

THE SCOTTS ARE HAVING A BABY.
NOW THE HORROR WILL BEGIN ALL OVER...

IT LIVES AGAIN!



By **JAMES DIXON**
based on the screenplay by
LARRY COHEN

**NOW A MOVIE OF BONEFREEZING
TERROR FROM WARNER BROS.**

Ballantine/Novel/27693/\$1.95



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ONE

It was July. Tucson, Arizona. Beautiful skies. A city of almost perpetual sunshine where one beautiful day follows another. A place where people vacation in order to escape the winters or the humidity back East. Or, if they're really lucky, they pick up and move there, just like that.

Jody Scott was just such a person. Jody, young, lovely, and talented, was first violinist with the Tucson Symphony. She and her husband, Eugene, an attorney and partner in his own law firm, Foster and Scott, moved to Tucson from Chicago two years ago, and now they felt as if they had never lived anywhere else.

In their home just outside Tucson, tastefully furnished in Spanish decor, twenty or so friends of the enormously, first-time pregnant Jody Scott were giving her a surprise baby shower.

Throughout the Scotts' living room were scattered open boxes from the best stores of Tucson and Phoenix. Jody, in the middle of all this, was opening the last of the presents.

At the same time a tall, nervous-looking woman was busy apologizing as Jody took off the last of the wrapping. Obviously the present was from her.

"I really couldn't think what to get since I didn't know if it'd be a boy or a girl," she fussed.

Another woman, fat, drinking wine, as were all the women at the shower, shouted, "Yeah, well, listen, Myra, we were all in the same fix," evoking a chorus of laughs from the rest of the women.

Jody now had the box undone, and from the look on her face she just loved the present. Carefully she picked it out of the box — a tiny violin.

“Oh,” the women gushed. One of them, her voice almost a shriek, cried, “He's going to be another Heifetz, I just know it!”

“Oh, thank you,” Jody said, “thank you.”

She tried to get to her feet; no luck. She was too big to manage it easily.

“Here we go.” A dozen helping hands lifted her up.

“Thank you,” she said again, smiling. “Oh, I must show Eugene.”

Jody waddled off across her lovely living room and headed for her husband.

Eugene Scott, dark, handsome, stood talking with two men by the bar. There were a few other men scattered throughout the room, most of them anxiously waiting for their wives to give them the signal to leave.

“Eugene,” she said, “look what Myra gave us!”

“That's great, honey, great,” he said, pulling her close, and brushing up against her ear, he whispered, “When are they going to leave?”

Jody kissed him back. She whispered in his ear, “I know, I know.”

The Scotts were not well acquainted with baby-shower protocol, certainly not Tucson, Arizona, baby-shower protocol, because if they had been, they could have rested easy. As soon as the last gift was opened, the pacesetters among the women were rounding up their purses and their husbands and shouting their delighted “Oh, we had a wonderful time, hope you have another one real soon” and making their hasty way toward the door.

Several lagged behind for one last drink or another piece of cake, for which Jody was just as well pleased; after all, what was she going to do with all that food? The way the baby was kicking, she might be in the hospital any time now.

"Doesn't anybody want some of this cake?" Jody pleaded. "It's just a shame to waste it."

The fat woman piped up, downing still more wine, "I'll take the cake if you throw in those little sandwiches there, too."

Jody laughed. "It's a deal. I'll put them in a little bag."

"No, no," the woman protested. "Leave them right there, I'll take them right on the plate. That way I'll wash the dish for you, save you all kinds of work."

Jody laughed. She'd had some wine herself. "You're a genius, you know that?"

"You know," said the woman, "I think you're right. Abner," she called. An austere-looking gentleman with a beaming red face appeared at her elbow. "We're taking these," the fat woman instructed him.

Without a word the man picked up the tray of tiny sandwiches and the plate with the remaining cake and started for the door. His wife followed closely behind, making sure he didn't miss anything.

All this just about convulsed Jody as, holding on to the table for support, she tried to get her husband's attention. "Eugene, look!" she called.

When she reached the door, the fat woman turned around and called back into the room, "So long, Eugene, don't forget to call us as soon as she goes into labor."

Her husband, almost out the door, leaned back into the room, as if this were his parting joke. "We'll meet you at

the hospital. Who knows, it might even be a baby," he laughed.

That said, he and his wife were out the door.

Jody was still laughing, looking around to see if Eugene had caught any of this. Eugene, however, was having problems of his own. Another woman, feeling very little pain, insisted on kissing the father-to-be good-bye while her husband stood there telling Eugene that in no time at all Jody would be back with the orchestra and he'd be doing diapers instead of filing briefs.

Eugene laughed dutifully at the man's little joke, at the same time bending to be kissed by the gushing wife. Will this ever end? he moaned to himself. Jody, seeing his discomfort, smiled gently in his direction.

Happily now, everyone had just about left, except Lydia, of course. Lydia was Jody's best friend. She planned the baby shower, making sure Jody was out of the house all day so that the food could be brought in and everything could be made ready to surprise her when she came home.

Besides Lydia, there was still one other guest. Or was he a guest? He seemed to be going nowhere, as if he were lingering. During the party no one seemed to know him. A quiet man who somehow projected a feeling of danger, he watched everybody, especially Jody, but talked to no one.

Lydia, the friendly neighborhood divorcée, who considered every unescorted male up for grabs, had tried to speak to him earlier, but this strange man had deliberately crossed the room to get away from her.

Now Lydia was ready to leave, kissing Jody fondly on the cheek.

"Oh, Lydia," said Jody, really appreciative, "thank you. Really. How can I ever thank you enough?"

"We did it, didn't we?" Lydia said, including Eugene, who had come to join them. "We really surprised you, didn't we, Jody?"

"You sure did," said Jody, "you sure did." Jody would never admit to her dying day that two weeks ago she had picked up the phone and heard Eugene, on the extension, making out the guest list with Lydia. Consequently, today she practically had to fall down on the floor in mock surprise when she walked in and all those people started jumping out from behind every available piece of furniture, yelling, "Surprise!"

"We got you, honey," said Eugene. He gave Jody a big hug. "God, I thought they'd never leave." Then, remembering Lydia, "Of course, I didn't mean you," he added gallantly.

"Oh, don't worry," said Lydia. "Now that I have a few drinks in me, I thought I'd try that new singles joint in the shopping mall everyone's talking about."

"Good idea," said Eugene. "I'll get my coat."

"Funny," said Jody scornfully, giving him a friendly whack.

"I thought I'd latch on to that friend of yours over there," said Lydia. She gestured toward that same man, who now stood silently by the front window. "But he avoided me like the plague."

Eugene looked over at the man, noticing him really for the first time.

"Who is he, anyway?" Lydia continued.

Jody and Eugene exchanged questioning glances.

"Well, anyway, find out if he's queer. I'd just like to know." Lydia smiled.

"Can't stand rejection, huh?" Jody laughed.

"That's just about it," Lydia answered with a fake pout as she started off with a flounce, down the front walk.

Lydia gone, Jody and Eugene turned to face the man, standing in the corner of their living room. He was now nervously smoking a cigarette.

"Who is that guy?" Eugene asked, thinking out loud, as if he should know him from court; from somewhere.

"Damned if I know," said Jody. She turned from closing the door and squinted through the semidarkness of the late-afternoon light at the man.

"Well, there's only one thing to do, go and ask him," said Eugene, turning to Jody with a tight smile. "After all, this is our house, right?"

Jody smiled back. "You're absolutely right. Besides, I never heard of a party crasher at a baby shower, anyway."

Just as they started to cross the living room to the stranger, who really seemed to be waiting for them, another woman, who had been, undoubtedly, in the bathroom, struggled toward them, dragging her six-year-old child behind her. The child, on the verge of tears, was whining at his mother.

"Leggo!"

"When I get in the car, I'll let go, and put that down," his mother screamed back. In his hand the child held a smeary fistful of chocolate mints.

Jody tried to intercede. "It's all right, he can have them," she said, trying to be helpful.

"Oh, sure," snapped the woman. "And let him be sick all over the car? Boy, are you lucky," she added as she dragged the child closer to the front door. "You don't have to worry for another five years. When they go to school,

that's when they turn rotten. Dirty mouths and drugs. You'll see!"

While Jody was leading the distraught woman and the child to the front door, agreeing with her all the way, Eugene approached the uninvited guest who seemed to have crashed, of all things, their baby shower.

Closer, Eugene peered at the man in the fading light, asking himself whether he just didn't recognize him.

"Hi!" Eugene smiled, hoping that might trigger something from the man.

"Hello," said the man, not giving Eugene much help.

"I'm sorry we didn't get to talk," Eugene continued, feeling him out.

"I didn't want to interfere. You have so many good friends." The man smiled. The smile was an effort on the severe, gaunt face.

"Yes, we do. This is kind of embarrassing," answered Eugene, sure now that he didn't know this man, "but could I ask what you're doing here?"

By way of an explanation, the man looked at Eugene with sad dark eyes and said, "I flew down from Los Angeles."

Eugene nodded, not sure what that had to do with anything.

"I'm sorry," the man continued, "my name is Frank Davis."

Eugene nodded again, still lost as to who this man might be.

The man looked at Eugene, unbelieving. "You mean you've never heard of me?" he asked.

“Should I have?” Eugene shrugged, suddenly weary of this game.

Mr. Davis looked over Eugene's shoulder. Eugene followed his gaze. Jody had entered the living room, and under the guise of picking up a few dishes and stacking them, was trying to listen to the conversation.

Eugene, a bit annoyed at his wife's obvious deception, called over to her, “Honey, this is Mr. Davis from Los Angeles.”

Jody, only too willingly, came over to join the conversation as Eugene asked, almost irritably, “I hope, after all this, you're not selling insurance or encyclopedias, Mr. Davis, or anything like that.”

“No, Mr. Scott,” said Davis evenly. “I'm not trying to sell you anything, believe me.”

Eugene turned to his wife, who stood there still holding two soiled dishes in her hand. “Look, honey,” he said, “why don't you take care of what you have to in the kitchen? We'll work this out.”

Jody gave him a look, telling him what she thought of that suggestion, and stated simply, “The kitchen can wait. I'd like to hear what the gentleman has to say.”

“It's about your baby,” said Davis, jumping in before Eugene could respond, addressing the remark to Jody, as if trying to convince her she must stay.

When he said, “It's about your baby,” a sudden chill passed right through Jody's body. The way he said it. The way he'd been looking at her. She had seen him looking at her during the baby shower. But with all the confusion, all the activity going on, she had just let it pass, forgotten about it. Now she must face it and she couldn't; she wanted to change the subject. “Would you like coffee or

something?" she asked, in a tone her mother would have been proud of.

"Come on," said Eugene, annoyed at this sudden civility toward this man, "let's stop this playing-hostess nonsense. This man barges in here and waits around all afternoon, and now he won't tell us what he wants."

Frank stood his ground, as if he'd been through this before. "I have told you," he insisted.

"Will you let him speak?" cried Jody, for some inexplicable reason suddenly on this stranger's side.

Eugene, not quite understanding what had come over his wife, reacted sharply. "Who's stopping him?" he almost shouted. "And what's got into you?" he asked his wife.

"Look," said Jody, ignoring her husband. She looked squarely at Frank Davis, as if convinced now that she must face it, whatever it was. "If there's something about my baby, then go ahead and tell me. You're making me very nervous, Mr. Davis."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Scott," said Frank. "Really, I am."

"Just tell me what it is," said Jody, close to tears for some reason, "just tell me what it is."

Frank steadied himself. All business, he looked straight at Jody Scott. "Your obstetrician is Dr. Fairchild — Edward Fairchild of this city?"

"Yes," said Jody.

"Oh, come on," interrupted Eugene. "We know her doctor is Dr. Fairchild."

"Please, Gene," his wife pleaded, not taking her eyes off Frank Davis. "Go ahead, Mr. Davis."

"I don't know if you're aware, Mrs. Scott," said Frank, "that doctors all over the country have been alerted by the federal government and asked to report what they

consider to be any abnormal pregnancies." Turning to Eugene, Davis asked, "Were you aware of that, Mr. Scott?"

"No, I wasn't," answered Eugene coldly. "Besides, that hasn't anything to do with us. Jody has had a very uneventful pregnancy. Everything's perfectly normal."

Frank looked again at Jody. "Didn't your doctor, Dr. Fairchild, put you through an extensive series of tests just last week?" he asked.

Jody nodded. "Yes, yes, he did."

Eugene looked at her questioningly. "You didn't tell me anything about any new tests."

Jody, as if she hadn't heard her husband, looked at Frank Davis, puzzled by something he'd said earlier. "You said abnormal pregnancies?"

Frank nodded. Then, compassionately, "The baby's very large, isn't it?"

"Oh, my God," Jody moaned. She knew now! "Wait a minute," she gasped. She turned to her husband. "I know who he is!" she cried. "You remember? We read about it, last year in some magazine! Time, I think, and even the newspapers — the newspapers had pictures of him and his wife! Frank Davis!"

Eugene stared at her, still not connecting the name.

"Frank Davis," Jody repeated. "The Davis baby? They even had that thing on CBS, that special news program!" She turned to Davis. "You wouldn't let yourself be interviewed, isn't that right?"

"That's right," said Frank.

"Yes," said Eugene, remembering the whole tragedy now. He remembered having sat around discussing it with other lawyers. "I saw it. I was very sorry for you, Mr. Davis."

"Thank you," said Frank, looking at Jody again.

Jody saw his look; searching for something to say, anything to delay what this strange man was going to tell her. "Is your — wife all right now?" she tried.

"Yes, she's recovered," said Frank, keeping his eyes, those dark, piercing eyes, riveted on this lovely young woman.

Eugene was watching that look, too. He knew what it must be doing to his wife. He had to say it. He had to put this bizarre meeting and discussion in its right perspective.

"I have to say this," Eugene began, looking pointedly at Frank, "for my wife's sake."

"Go ahead, Mr. Scott," said Frank, taking Eugene's look straight on.

Eugene began again. "Have you recovered, Mr. Davis? Or do you just go around to people's houses and break in on their parties and try to frighten them?"

Frank, not missing a beat, returned Eugene's lawyer's gaze. "If you read about me, Mr. Scott, then you no doubt have heard about the other one, the one born in Seattle," he said.

"I remember," Jody interjected. "It was killed, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Frank answered, "they killed it at birth."

"Who's they?" Eugene asked, less than kind.

"You really want to know?" said Davis evenly.

"Listen, mister," said Eugene, "you've gone this far for whatever the hell reason. So you might as well tell us the whole story."

A pause — and then Frank Davis answered, “The father did it. The father killed it.”

A crash! Jody had dropped the dishes she had been holding since the beginning of this incredible discussion. She sank down onto a small couch right behind her, moaning softly. “Oh, Gene,” she said.

Eugene moved over to her. He held her, trying to comfort her, talking to her softly. “It's all right, honey. It's all right. Take it easy.” And then, still on one knee, his arms around his wife, he yelled up at Davis, “You son of a bitch, can't you see what you're doing? You're frightening her! There's no call for this. This has nothing to do with us!”

Frank took a step toward Eugene, beseechingly. “Mr. Scott —”

Eugene got up quickly. “Get out,” he said. “Get out or I'll call the police.”

Frank did not budge. Calmly, in control of the situation, he began again. “Mr. Scott, that's just what you don't want to do. The police aren't going to be of any help to you or your baby. Believe me, the only one interested in saving your baby is me, and a few good friends,” he added.

“Listen, you bastard,” said Eugene, taking a step toward Frank as if he were about to hit him.

Jody stopped him. “Honey, please.”

“Mr. Scott,” said Davis, “five minutes, give me five minutes. Surely you can give me that if there's even the slightest chance that what I say determines whether your baby lives or dies.”

Jody clutched her husband's hand, pulling him down next to her on the couch. “Please, honey,” she said.

Reluctantly Eugene sat next to his wife. "All right," he said, "five minutes."

Frank took out a cigarette, lighted it, and sat down on an end table placed conveniently just to his left. Inhaling deeply, he started his story again, looking mostly at Jody.

"There were blood specimens taken by Dr. Fairchild, isn't that right?" he asked.

"Yes," Jody replied.

"They matched up with other samples..." Then Davis stopped. He looked at them as if he were afraid to tell them more, as if he would have preferred that they realized what he was trying to tell them without his actually saying it.

"What other samples?" asked Eugene warily.

Taking another deep drag, Davis knew then that he must, however painfully, tell the whole story. "The government," he said, "has been alerting doctors all over the country to be on the lookout for pregnancies that bear certain symptoms, symptoms traceable from the mother's bloodstream. They're trying to locate these infants before they are born..."

Davis paused. Eugene picked it up. "For what reason?" he asked.

"So they can be terminated," answered Frank Davis.

"Oh, my God," moaned Jody.

"This is all nonsense," said Eugene, about to get to his feet again.

"Wait," said Jody. She suddenly realized something. Something that had bothered her the last couple of days. "At Dr. Fairchild's office the other day, they were very strange to me. Remember, Gene? I told you that, didn't I? They were very strange... quiet. And usually the waiting

room is very busy, full of women. I tried to make some kind of dumb joke to the nurses, such as how come the doctor lost all his patients, was he charging too much, or something. And all they said was that all the appointments were canceled that afternoon. 'Oh,' I said. I was all set to leave. But there he was, Dr. Fairchild, waiting for me. Didn't I tell you?"

"No, you didn't mention it," said Eugene.

Jody got up. Full of her story, she paced back and forth across the room, letting it all out.

"Well, maybe I didn't mention it then. It wasn't important then. It just made me feel kind of funny. There he was, Dr. Fairchild, all alone in his office, behind the desk. He never even got up to greet me. Nothing, no examination, nothing. And then, when it was time to leave, he just sat there, as if he didn't have a friend in the world. I figured something happened to him, that he was having a bad day. But then when I got back out in the waiting room, it was the same thing. Then I figured, either something was drastically wrong, or I was imagining things."

"What kind of things?" Eugene asked, still not believing a word of this.

"Like the way the nurses talked to me, as I said, uptight, and you know they usually go out of their way to be friendly."

Now Eugene got up and went to his wife. "Honey, come on now, this is all nonsense and you know it."

"Now wait a second, Mr. Scott," said Frank. "Please listen."

"No, you wait a second, Mr. Davis," Eugene interrupted. "You come in here with this cock-and-bull story about blood samples, then my wife says she went to the doctor's and nobody talked to her. So from that I'm

supposed to believe — what?” Eugene stopped. He looked at Frank Davis, who had now moved to the window, peering out as if he were looking for something. “What do you want me to believe, Mr. Davis?”

Taking another quick look out the window, Davis turned to him and with all sincerity explained, “I’ll tell you what I want you to believe... what you must believe. Your name has been forwarded to the authorities. There are certain people assigned to this program. They have been notified that there’s a reasonable expectation that you will give birth to...”

“Don’t say it,” said Eugene.

Jody gasped. Her hands came up, covering her face. “Oh, my God! Oh, no, please!”

Eugene held her close, supporting her, and brought her back to the couch. “Sit down,” he pleaded.

“Oh, Gene,” she sobbed. “Gene, he’s telling the truth. I know he’s telling the truth! Oh, God, no!”

Eugene was furious. “You miserable bastard!” he roared at Davis, trying to get up. “Look what you’ve done to her!”

“Gene, no,” Jody screamed, holding on to him, “You’ve got to listen to him, Gene, please!”

Frank moved a step or two closer, his heart going out to this beautiful young woman, but at the same time kept his distance from the maddened Eugene Scott. “I went through this myself,” said Frank. “I know exactly how you feel. I was the first. If it *is* one of these children, it’ll come early, unexpectedly. They’re prepared for that. The team arrived the day before yesterday.”

“What team?” Eugene snapped.

“Specialists,” Frank answered, gazing toward the window. “They have specialists trained, ready for this sort of thing.”

Eugene followed Frank Davis's gaze. “Are you trying to tell me that people — specialists, as you call them — have come down here for the specific purpose of killing our baby?”

“If it's like mine when it's born,” Frank answered, “. . . yes.”

“Davis, you're out of your goddamn mind!” said Eugene, getting to his feet.

Davis ignored this remark. He moved back again, toward the window. “I don't have much time,” he said. At the window, he again peered out into the street. “There's a man named Mallory across the street. He's watching this house. It's just like a job to them; they change shifts every eight hours. All except Mallory. He's always there, it seems.”

Eugene, not believing any of this, moved quickly across the room to see.

“No, he'll see you,” Frank warned. “Is there another window?”

“Over there,” said Jody, pointing to a smaller window that sat on an angle to the street.

“Perfect,” said Davis, moving to that window, Eugene and Jody joining him.

Outside, it was almost dark. There was a late-model station wagon, a big one, a Chrysler or a Buick, parked across the street. A cold-looking man in a short-sleeved shirt, impervious to the night air, stood by the car, his arms crossed, making no pretense about it. Whatever he

was doing out there, one thing was clear: it had to do with their house.

"That's him," said Frank. "That's Mallory."

Eugene sighed. Convinced before that this Davis was crazy, one thing was certain to him now: that man across the street, whoever he was, was watching his house. "I saw them earlier. I thought they were surveying, or something," he said. "I thought they were going to build something."

"And Dr. Fairchild's part of all this?" Jody asked, still not able to grasp the situation fully.

"Yes." Frank nodded slowly.

"Oh, God," said Jody, going back toward the couch. Eugene and Frank followed her. Eugene turned to Frank as they went.

"These men, they know you?" he asked.

"They know me," said Davis. "But they don't know I'm in Tucson. I came in here with the other guests for the shower. I don't think they recognized me."

After seating Jody on the couch, Eugene asked Davis, his lawyer's mind racing, "How many are there on this team, would you say?"

"Four of them," Frank answered.

"You know where they're staying?"

"At the Sunset Inn. That's the closest place to the hospital."

"They know our hospital, too?" questioned Eugene.

"Mr. Scott," said Frank, "they know it all. They even know you're an attorney, which might complicate things, as far as the law is concerned. They took all that into

consideration, and they still know one other thing: they're still going to do it."

Eugene sighed. Suddenly he crossed the room to the bar. Davis, sensing that Scott wanted to talk to him alone, followed.

At the bar, Eugene poured himself a straight vodka, and as Davis joined him, he asked, "You want one?"

Frank shook his head.

Eugene then picked up his drink, at least two fingers, and downed it in one full gulp. Finished, he whirled angrily back at Davis. "If it's going to be a monster, why not kill it? Why save it, for Christ's sake?"

Frank answered calmly, academically. He and others had thought this all out; they knew the answer, and the reason why.

"Everyone uses that word so easily, Mr. Scott. 'Monster.' It's even in the textbooks. The new medical textbooks they're putting out have a section on the Davis Monster Syndrome. Syndrome, they call it, as if it were a disease, because it's different."

Jody, refusing to be left out, had come up behind them. Vaguely, she asked, "They didn't show any pictures of your baby in that magazine I read. What did it look like?"

"Honey, please," said Eugene, not at all approving of the way this discussion was going. Next Davis would be taking snapshots out of his wallet, passing them around. He looked at Davis. "How many people did it murder?"

Frank returned his look. "Murder?" he asked. "Mr. Scott, you above all, as a lawyer, should know the definition of murder. In the delivery room they tried to suffocate it, and it fought back."

"You know that for a fact?" questioned Jody, inching closer.

"I know it," Frank replied. "I've asked people, different people. It's pretty well documented they tried to kill it as soon as it was born." Frank stopped, then he began to cry, softly at first, trying to control himself.

"I'm sorry," said Jody, moving even closer, her heart going out to this man.

"It found us," Frank sobbed. "It came to me for protection and I... I shot it. Because they told me to. What did I know? They told me it was a monster. I shot my own child."

"Please, Mr. Davis," said Eugene, seeing how much he was upsetting Jody.

But Davis continued. "But he forgave me. Is that an animal? Is that a monster that can forgive? Is it?" he asked, looking at Eugene.

"No... I suppose not," Eugene agreed, saying anything to quiet him.

Frank paused a moment, calmer now. He wiped his wet face with his handkerchief. "We cooperated with the authorities, you know. Oh, we were the perfect little citizens. After all, they made us feel so guilty. So my wife and I let them take tests. You wouldn't believe it. Test after test." He smiled, the first time the Scotts had seen him really smile. "They even had tests for the tests... So now, now they trust us."

"Have you done this before?" Eugene asked. "I mean, gone to other people like us?"

"There was a woman in Evanston, Illinois," Frank said, in complete control of himself again. "I found out too late. I got as far as Chicago. I tried to reach her by phone. I

didn't give my name — that would have blown my cover, as they say. She hung up on me. It was too late anyway... the team..." He pointed toward the window. "Mallory was already there. They were prepared in the delivery room. They snuffed out its life, killed it."

"But you told us your name..." Eugene said skeptically.

"Yes," said Frank. "After that I made up my mind. The next time I had information, the next time I had a chance to save one of these..." — almost afraid to use the word — ". . . babies, I would do anything or say anything to save it."

Eugene asked, very logically, "And how do you get the information, Mr. Davis?"

"Friends," answered Davis, "people who have infiltrated the organization. People who feel the same as we do and are interested in saving these poor creatures."

Jody, her mind on another track, asked "Was it one of those?"

Frank turned to her. "Excuse me?"

"The baby in Evanston."

"Oh, yes," said Frank. "Yes, it was one of those... There have been two false alarms, two mistakes, but somehow" — he looked at Jody — "I sense this isn't a mistake. May I" — he paused: — "touch it?"

"Yes," said Jody, not waiting for her husband's approval, "yes, you may."

Frank moved closer to her. Jody stood there waiting, as if this strange man might have some healing power deep within him. Frank placed his hand on her belly as Eugene looked on, stunned by all of this into an almost comatose state. He heard Davis say:

"I feel it. As soon as I came inside the house, I felt it. It was the same feeling I got when I knew my son was close by."

Jody looked at him as if everything were decided, everything determined. "They don't know the cause, do they?"

"No," answered Frank. "Some of us believe it's the next step forward in evolution. A world in which the human race can survive the pollution of this planet."

"But not the human race," said Eugene, listening carefully, picking up Davis's every word. "Not the human race as we know it. These..." — searching for the right word — "...creatures..."

"Don't be afraid to call them that." Frank smiled, his eyes glazed, as if he were describing some higher calling, some secret cult. "You probably won't be able to help it, until you see yours and recognize yourself in it." He turned to Eugene. "I hope you have that opportunity, Mr. Scott. A few of us have. It makes us very remarkable in our own way."

Eugene felt very peculiar with that strange man smiling at him. This man he had not known a half-hour, who now stood in his living room with that ingenuous smile that never quite worked, telling him things, impossible things, that would shape the rest of his life.

All Eugene wanted now was to get Davis out of his house so that he could be alone with his wife, his beautiful, exquisite Jody, who now stood there, her life, too, a shambles before her.

Eugene motioned toward the window. "You'd better leave."

"Oh, yes," said Frank, suddenly remembering the danger outside. "Is there a back way?"

Eugene, only too willing to oblige, motioned toward the breakfast room that led to a back door. "This way," he said.

Frank paused, went to Jody, took her hand. "Goodbye, Mrs. Scott."

"Good-bye," she said. She looked straight at Frank Davis as if some secret bond linked them. Eugene stood by, powerless to do anything about it.

Jody watched as her husband led the way through the small breakfast room and out the back door.

Eugene Scott brought Frank quickly across the well-cared-for back yard. Reaching the gate, he stopped to open it. Frank, beside him, was telling him tensely, "Don't try to reach me. I'll be in touch. Go to your office tomorrow. Don't do anything to break the routine."

Eugene looked at him: a man obsessed. "Listen, Mr. Davis, you know I really don't think I can believe any of this."

"Mr. Scott," replied Frank, "two years ago, if someone had come to my door, I'd have been the same way. Who could believe such a thing? But it happened, and it's going to happen to a lot more people. Maybe thousands, maybe millions, before this century is over."

At a back window, Jody watched her husband and Davis at the back fence. She could only imagine what they were talking about, things in all likelihood they did not want her to hear. She looked down. She saw her huge belly, resting against the sill of the window. Tenderly she rubbed it. "Oh, please. Please, God, no!" she murmured.

She looked up. Frank Davis was gone. Eugene was coming toward her, back across the yard. "Oh, no," she whispered, "he can't see me like this." She had to do

something to look busy. Crazy she thought, If I'm busy all this will go away. It will all become a bad dream.

Quickly she moved into the living room. The presents! She saw the presents, scattered all over the floor. That's what I'll do, I'll get busy with the presents, she thought; then nothing will be wrong, everything will be as it was.

That was how Eugene found her, kneeling on their soft, thick carpet, picking up the gifts; all those lovely gifts she had received that day. Tiny sweaters for the baby; a little jumper suit to bring the baby home in from the hospital; fancy, intricate little bibs; one tiny, lovely little thing after another.

As she held those things in her hands, folding them carefully, she began to cry, burying her face in the soft material of the baby clothing.

Eugene went to her noiselessly across the soft carpet.

"Jody, Jody..."

He knelt beside her. He held her awkwardly, the packages between them.

"Honey, don't," he whispered.

"Did he tell you what it looked like?" she sobbed.

"No, honey, no."

"Half an hour ago," she said, "we were having a party. And now, all of a sudden, we've accepted the fact that our baby's not going to be normal, that somebody's going to try and kill it."

"Honey," Eugene protested, "I haven't accepted anything."

"Yes, you have," she said. She looked at him with blazing clarity. "You know who this man is, what he has gone through. Why else would he be here?"

Eugene had no answer for her... none.

Jody continued. "Now we're part of some conspiracy to save our own child. How can that be? In less time than it would take to eat lunch, how can we talk logically about something that isn't possible?"

"It's like an accident, honey," said Eugene, "like any accident that happens to you. A car jumping the divider, a plane crashing into your house — sure, it happens fast. People are alive one minute, and the next they're not. That's how it is."

"I feel exactly as I did when they called me up. Remember when Mom called me up when Dad died of the heart attack?" Jody asked.

Eugene nodded. "Yes," he said.

"That's how I feel. It takes forever to plan a life and only a second for everything to fall apart. Damn it," she said. She took her beautiful artist's hands, and rolling them into an unaccustomed fist, banged them over and over again into the floor. "Why us?" she cried. "Why us?"



And then it was night. Only a few lights were on in the upstairs level of the Scotts' house. The station wagon was still there, across the street from the house; the man was still there, too, leaning against the side of the car, keeping his constant, unholy vigil.

Inside the house, in their bedroom, Jody was playing her violin, a piece by Mozart, trying to calm herself by doing what she did best. She stopped. She felt something.

She reached down to touch her stomach. She called toward the bathroom:

"It's kicking again, honey. It's kicking hard."

"I know," said Eugene. His voice came from the partially opened bathroom door. "It's always been an active baby."

"Do you hear what I'm calling it?" Jody asked. "IT — not 'he' any more, or 'she.'"

Eugene, still in the bathroom, answered her. "Come on, honey. Lots of people call their baby 'it.'"

Jody gently put down her violin; she moved to their king-sized bed and let herself onto it carefully. Now, rolling herself almost into a ball, she called plaintively back toward the bathroom:

"Honey, what's keeping you?"

"Be right there, Babes," came Eugene's answer.

In the bathroom, Eugene, at a small shuttered window, was looking out across the street. There he is, he thought, standing there as if he doesn't give a good goddamn who sees him. Eugene knew one thing for sure. Nobody would stand out there like that, in a neighborhood like this, in Tucson, Arizona, at this time of night, if he didn't have somebody on his side... The police at least.

"Honey?"

"Okay, Jody, be right there," he answered.

Still in the bathroom, he moved to the medicine cabinet and took out some pills. Then he poured a couple into the palm of his hand. He drew a glass of water from the tap, and then, as an afterthought, opened the same box of pills and took two himself. Then he left the bathroom, shutting off the light.

In the bedroom, Jody, still rolled into a ball, watched her husband cross the room.

“Here, honey,” he said, “take these.”

Sitting on the bed, he handed her the pills and the glass of water.

Docilely she sat up and took the pills. Then she looked at him, asking him with her limpid green eyes, “Is he still there?”

Expecting it, Eugene was all set to lie. At least he could give her that, so maybe she could sleep... but he couldn't. “Yes,” he said, “he is.”

“Oh, Gene,” she cried, “what can we do?”

“I don't know,” he said. “I don't know.”



And that same night, in downtown Tucson, on the shabby side of town, the “Vacancy” sign outside a small motel abruptly changed. The word “No” popped onto the old neon sign, and it now read, “No Vacancy.”

From a motel window in one of the rooms, Frank Davis watched a couple who had just registered make their drunken, laughing way across the courtyard, searching for their room.

The phone behind him rang.

Frank turned and moved toward the phone, passing a collection of seedy furniture that looked as if it had been picked up, a piece at a time, in a succession of second-hand stores.

"Hello," he said.

"Your call to L.A. is ready," a raspy, whiskey-soaked voice announced.

"Thank you," said Frank.

A moment, and then another voice said, "Hello."

"I've contacted them," said Frank, not wasting any time. "I think they believe me. I'm going to need help down here right away, she's very close... I'm at the Mirage Motor Inn, about a mile from the hospital."

"I understand," said the voice, and the phone clicked.

TWO

It was early the next day. The time, right after sunrise, when everything is beautiful and not too many people are up and about. The best time of day. The skies were a bright blue. The sun, as almost always in Tucson, was bright in the sky.

On the near-empty highway, a small, white Pinto Runabout moved well within the legal speed limit toward a large, sprawling building in the distance. A sign at the side of the road told the driver what the building was: HOSPITAL THIS EXIT.

The Pinto moved to the right, into the exit lane, and finally onto a smaller street, heading straight for that hospital.

Reaching the almost empty parking lot, the car wandered a bit, as if enjoying the luxury of choosing just about any parking spot it wanted. Finally it stopped, selecting a parking space right in the middle of things, as if choosing to remain as inconspicuous as possible.

The door on the driver's side opened and Frank Davis got out. Quickly, he looked around him, as though he expected that someone might be following him. Then, satisfied everything was all right, he started for the hospital.

Reaching the front steps, he walked briskly through the front door that sprang open in response to his foot hitting the electronic pad.

Inside, a uniformed guard sat at a combination security check/reception desk, his head buried in the

morning paper. Hearing Frank's brisk approach, he looked up. Frank nodded curtly, never slackening his step. As if this were his accustomed, every-morning path, he kept right on going. The guard nodded back, his head disappearing immediately back into the newspaper.

Farther down the hall Frank stopped at the bank of elevators.

"Going up," a friendly voice called out. Quickly Frank marched into the massive hospital elevator.

"Floor, please," the smiling attendant, a huge black man, said.

"Uh... four, please," said Frank, making sure he didn't pick too high a figure, since he didn't know how many floors the hospital really had.

"Four it is," answered the elevator man, slamming the steel doors shut.

The elevator took off with a jolt; Frank grabbed the rail for support. All of a sudden he felt weak, his stomach queasy. No wonder, he thought; he hadn't eaten anything since yesterday. Yesterday at the airport in L.A. Just after he got the call from the "organization" that told him they had received information that there was a good possibility another one of "those babies" was about to be born to a couple in Tucson. Would he like to go? Of course he would go.

"Four," a voice intruded.

"Oh," said Frank, "thank you."

Frank walked out of the elevator. He started off busily down the hall, as if he knew exactly where he was going.

Hearing the elevator doors close, he stopped. Now he began to look around, getting his bearings, making sure no

one was watching. He saw a sign reading "EXIT" and started off in that direction.

At the end of the hall he tried the exit door. It was open. Through that, he was now in the rarely used stairwell that led to every floor of the hospital and served primarily, he supposed, as a fire exit.

Then, taking his time, he went from floor to floor, trying door after door, finding out what door led where, getting the feel of the hospital. He was finding out just where everything was in case, for whatever reason, he would need to know later on.



Later that morning, in an ultramodern office building in downtown Tucson housing the chic offices of the bright new law firm in town, Foster and Scott, the partners, Al Foster and Eugene Scott, and two of their associates were having their usual midmorning staff meeting.

Eugene, seated in the middle of the fast-paced lawyers' talk, seemed far away, lost in his own thoughts.

"Gene?" said his partner, Al Foster. "Gene."

Eugene snapped out of it. He looked at his partner as if he had just discovered him sitting there. "I'm sorry," he said with a smile. "I was off in left field somewhere."

Foster returned his smile. "Then you'll talk to Clark?" he said.

"Clark?" said Eugene, trying to place who the hell he was.

Foster was annoyed. "In the city attorney's office, about the Goldfarb continuance."

"Oh, Clark. Oh, sure, I'll have that all taken care of. No problem," said Eugene, finally recalling who Clark was.

A secretary entered. She was young and much too good-looking to be entirely functional.

"Excuse me," she said, batting her store-bought eyelashes at anyone who might have been interested. "There's a Mr. Davis on the phone for Mr. Scott."

"Thank you, Connie," said Al Foster. Annoyed, he pushed the phone at his elbow over toward Eugene.

Eugene jumped up. "I'll take it in my office," he said, moving quickly past the young secretary and out the door.

A few steps along the hallway brought him to his private office. He closed the door behind him and rushed to the phone. "Yes," he said, not wailing to sit down.

"Can you meet me this afternoon about four o'clock?" Frank Davis asked.

"Four o'clock," said Eugene. "What for?"

"Please, Mr. Scott," said Frank, "just meet me. Have you told anybody about our conversation last night?"

"No," said Eugene. "Nobody."

"All right," said Frank, "there's a cafeteria on Main, just off Maple, I think it is."

"I know where it is."

"I'll meet you there," said Frank, "at four o'clock."

The phone went dead. Eugene sat staring at it. "What am I doing," he murmured, "talking to this maniac, trusting him? I must be out of my goddamn mind."



The cafeteria was deserted at that early hour. A few older people were there, taking advantage of the advertised "Early Bird Senior Citizens' Special." Frank was there waiting for Eugene as he entered the front door.

Smiling, he led Eugene over to where one picked up the trays and silverware. "I figured you hadn't eaten," he said, handing him a tray. "Your wife? How's she holding up?"

"All right," said Eugene, trying to get a good look at Davis as he adjusted his eyes to the dim light of the cafeteria. "She wanted to call her mother."

"Did she?" asked Davis, suddenly alarmed.

"No, I talked her out of it," said Eugene.

"Good," said Frank.

They started along the line. Eugene, although he didn't have much of an appetite, began arbitrarily putting things on his tray.

At the cashier's stand, Frank reached for his money.

"Here, let me get it," said Eugene.

"Next time," said Frank, smiling, already handing the clerk a bill.

After Frank had paid for Eugene's food — Jello, a side dish of spaghetti, and coffee — they started back toward the dining area. Eugene was about to sit at the first available table.

“Not here,” said Frank softly. He moved deeper into the cafeteria, Eugene following. “I have some people I want you to meet.”

Toward the back of the cafeteria, in the dimmest corner, sat two men. Eugene could just about make them out. One was large and muscular, the other smallish, with a beard. The small one was smoking an odd-looking pipe.

At the table Davis said simply, pointing to the small, bearded man, “Dr. Westley,” and then, to the large man, “Dr. Forrest. They flew in from Los Angeles this morning.”

Without getting up or shaking hands, Dr. Westley began. “I’ll be as brief as possible. We’re setting up facilities to deliver the baby outside the hospital.”

Eugene looked at them. He could not believe their gall. These two rumped-looking men, perfect strangers, were telling him what they were about to do with his wife and his baby.

“Who the hell do you think you are?” stormed Eugene. “Listen, I’m not all that sure this isn’t just some colossal joke. What makes you so sure you know what you’re talking about, anyway?”

Dr. Forrest, taking a different tack from that of the ruthlessly cold Dr. Westley, tried putting a calming hand on Eugene’s arm. “Mr. Scott,” he said, “we’ve seen stolen copies of the serologists’ reports on your wife’s blood. There can be no doubt —”

“What the hell’s a serologist?” Eugene interrupted.

“A serologist,” said Dr. Westley, as if reading from a textbook, “is a man who deals with the properties or the uses of serums.”

“That makes it as clear as mud,” said Eugene coldly.

“Mr. Scott, without getting into a whole technical explanation, which we don't have time for,” said Dr. Westley, “and which, quite frankly, you as a layman would have great difficulty understanding, the serum, or the animal fluid within your baby's blood, has exactly the same properties as the serum found in the blood of” — pointing to Frank Davis — “the Davis baby, the baby born in Seattle, and the other baby that was destroyed in Evanston, Illinois. All four had the same properties. All these babies were destroyed. Now we are attempting to save your baby. However, without your full cooperation and that of your wife, we won't have a chance in the world of doing it. That's it, it's just that clear. The rest is up to you.”

Westley was finished. Everyone was quiet. They sat waiting, watching Eugene.

“What do you want me to do?” asked Eugene in a weary voice.

Westley smiled, a controlled smile. He had won. “A mobile unit is being brought in from Los Angeles. It's on the road now.”

“A mobile unit!” Eugene exclaimed. “Why a mobile unit?”

“We can't wait for her to go into labor,” answered Dr. Forrest reassuringly. “We have to remove her from your home within the next twenty-four hours.”

“Why, for God's sake?” shouted Eugene, forgetting for the moment where they were.

The four men looked around conspiratorially to see if anyone was watching them.

Nobody was. The few people in the cafeteria were all absorbed in shoveling their food into their lowered faces.

“Because,” said Dr. Westley in a low voice, “if we do it any other way, the authorities, as I have already explained to you, will get hold of your baby and kill it. Isn't that right, Davis?”

“Yes,” said Davis, “that's right.”

They paused; no one spoke, waiting for Eugene. Finally he asked, “Will it be safe? I mean for Jody, in some kind of mobile setup?”

“There'll be no problem,” said Dr. Forrest, a good man, caught up, he believed, in a valid cause. “My plan is to take the child early, by Caesarean.”

“The prime danger, the only danger, will be the infant itself. We'll have to tranquilize it before delivery,” said Dr. Westley.

Just then a young man, a teen-ager really, sauntered by the table with a group of friends, all of them horsing around and laughing at some joke the leader was telling. Suddenly one of them grabbed for this boy's tray. The boy instinctively swung his tray away, splashing a glass of soda onto Dr. Westley.

“Hey, excuse me, man. No shit, I'm sorry, man,” said the boy.

As a further indignity to Dr. Westley, the young man, trying to be helpful, took a napkin from his tray and began wiping off the furious Dr. Westley's jacket, which threw his friends into squeals of laughter. “Really, man, I'm sorry,” continued the boy, now having a good time himself, especially after he saw the effect this was having on his friends.

“That's all right,” said the flustered Dr. Westley, trying to get the boy to stop wiping him. “I'll take care of it myself.”

"Awright, man, no sweat," said the boy, going off with his friends, laughing now with the rest of them.

"Inconsiderate little bastards," Westley fumed furiously. "I'd like to put them away somewhere. Let's go," he said to Dr. Forrest.

Dr. Forrest, embarrassed, got up to join him. He looked down at Eugene, trying to get closer, to establish some rapport with him. "I understand your wife's a very gifted musician."

"Yes, she is," answered Eugene.

"I play myself." The doctor smiled. "I look forward to meeting her."

"Doctor," said Dr. Westley impatiently.

"Yes, Doctor," said Dr. Forrest, joining his colleague.

Eugene watched the two of them leave the cafeteria. Dr. Westley was still dabbing angrily at his jacket with his own handkerchief.

Frank, as if sensing Eugene's uneasiness, and trying to reassure him, explained, "They're two of the best men in the business, really they are. They've given up their private practices to pursue this; become outlaws in the medical profession. They have a lot at stake," he said. "They won't let anything happen to your wife."

"That little guy, Westley. He didn't strike me as the type who's interested in saving the world," said Eugene.

"I've met a lot of these men in the last year or so," said Frank, "and a lot of them are not what you would call kind, considerate men. But they all have one thing in common: they all are obsessed with what the world will be like in fifty, a hundred years from now."

Eugene listened, playing with the salt shaker; he poured a few grains into his hand, feeling them on the tips

of his fingers. "What are they going to do with the baby when they get hold of it?" he asked. "Experiment on it?"

"Teach it," Frank said. "Train it. These babies were born at such an advanced state of development, God only knows what would have happened if they'd lived more than a few weeks. Their rate of mental and physical growth was tremendous."

Two policemen had come into the cafeteria. Like others before them, they had picked up their trays and moved on to the serving line. Frank saw them. Even though in all likelihood they were there simply to eat, he became extremely nervous. "Let's go," he said to Eugene.

They made their way to the exit. "You see," said Frank, talking very softly as he looked back at the policemen, making sure they were not following them, "we don't regard them as being subhuman. They're potentially superhuman. We think others realize that as well, and that's what they're really afraid of — the beginning of a race that will finally mean the eclipse of our own."

"That doesn't have a very pleasant ring to it," said Eugene.

Outside, they stood on the sidewalk as Frank looked around; one last look into the cafeteria to make sure the policemen were staying put. Satisfied that it was safe, he turned to Eugene.

"What choice do we have? If this is the future, why fight it? From all indications, more and more of these babies are going to be born. What are we going to do, have these goon squads out all over the country killing babies, anybody's baby?"

"So that's why you started up this organization?" Eugene asked.

“That's right,” replied Frank. “A lot of people out there, people with money, agree with us. Though they won't admit it publicly, they've helped us out, given us some of their money. That's how we were able to build our mobile unit.”

“Oh, yes, the mobile unit,” said Eugene. “When will I be able to see that?”

“With any luck, the mobile unit will be here tonight.” Frank smiled. “Then you'll see how well organized and prepared we are.”

THREE

It was dusk, just the time when motorists are undecided whether they should switch on their headlights. Consequently, on the crowded San Bernardino Freeway heading east out of Los Angeles, some cars had their lights on, some didn't, and every minute or so another set of lights popped on.

Among the bumper-to-bumper cars sat a huge mobile home, the kind that affluent families who don't know what else to do with their money take to the mountains for the weekend.

Inside this particular mobile home, however, was not a family but a well-trained medical team of three. All three were nurses, one of them female. The driver, Steven King, besides being a male nurse, had a black belt in karate to his name; the girl, Barbara, exceptionally well put together, had been an all-American volleyball player in her college days at UCLA. The third member of the team, Billy Grant, was small, wiry, and no one to mess with.

The back of the mobile home had been stripped of the usual luxurious accouterments, and in their place was a mobile operating room. Everything!

An operating table complete with stirrups to be used for the delivery of a baby; all the life-support systems, all the latest equipment, everything was there. In addition, over to the side in a special place was an incubator, unlike any other incubator. This one was ringed with steel bars! Clearly its purpose was to keep the baby alive; however, it

was also clear that anything put in there had no possibility of escape.



Later that evening, upstairs in the Scotts' home, a suitcase, much larger than one would take to a hospital to have a baby, lay open on the Scotts' bed. Jody moved back and forth from her closets, packing.

Finally she decided aloud, to no one in particular, "That's enough clothes," and disappeared into the bathroom. She appeared again, carrying at least half a dozen bottles of vitamin pills.

"All these vitamins, health food supplements, my famous vegetarian diet, they'll probably say that was what caused it," she muttered to herself.

"What?" said Eugene, standing by the window, lost in thought.

"My diet," she repeated, "they'll probably say my diet caused it."

"I've been thinking," said Eugene, not really paying any attention to what his wife had said, "about the legal aspects of this case. About something Davis said about their taking into consideration the fact that I'm a lawyer. The government can't possibly have any actual legal backup for what they're doing. It must come under the heading of emergency measures. But if this were tested in the courts..."

"Now you're starting to be yourself again," cheered Jody gaily. "Now you're thinking like a lawyer again."

"It'd never hold up," Eugene continued, "what they're trying to do to us... conspiring to murder our child. Of course, it's been going on for centuries... In India infanticide was a national policy. Strangling baby girls at birth, or spreading opium on the mother's nipple before she nursed them."

"Not a very good idea to be born female over there," Jody said, tucking in an extra pair of slippers.

"Today they just starve the little girls to death," said Eugene. "It's easy to kill what you consider inferior."

"Yes, well, over here they'd never get away with it, 'cause over here we run the country," said Jody. "So bring me my robe from the closet, you hear!"

"Yes, boss," said Eugene, affecting a shuffle.

Jody smiled as she watched her husband disappear into the walk-in closet. "The blue one," she called after him as an afterthought.

"I know the one," shouted Eugene, his voice muffled in the depths of the large closet.

Then, suddenly, a flash of pain surged across Jody's lovely face. Her first stab of real pain! Instinctively she knew, contractions! She sat quickly on the bed, hoping against hope. Another one followed shortly.

"Oh, no," she cried, "please, not yet."

Eugene came out of the closet. The look on his face told Jody he had heard her.

"What is it?"

"It's started," she said.

Eugene rushed to her. "You can't be sure."

"I know," Jody said simply. "That's all there is to it. I know."

Eugene looked at his watch. "Oh, Jesus!" he said. "It's only half-past five. Why didn't Davis give me a number where I could reach him?"

"It wasn't due for another week," said Jody, as if defending Frank Davis.

"I know," said Eugene, kneeling down beside his wife. He felt her stomach, looking up at her tenderly. "You're sure?" he asked.

Jody nodded, bringing her hand up to run it through her husband's black hair. "Maybe it's early labor," she said. "Maybe we can wait a while. Maybe they're almost here."

"Okay, honey," said Eugene, getting up. "Okay."

He closed the suitcase and picked it up. Then, taking his wife by the arm, he led her toward the door. "We'll wait downstairs," he said. "We'll wait as long as we can."

"Thank you," she said, leaning her head into the nape of his neck as they slowly crossed the room.



In the kitchen, the wall clock, a present from Jody's mother, modern-looking, impossibly out of place in this beautiful home, chimed. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

Jody looked at it. How can I tell my mother I hate that ugly clock? she thought. Then suddenly, another contraction!

She turned to Eugene sitting next to her at the kitchen table. "There's another one," she gasped. "Oh, Gene, they're coming closer now!"

"Do you want me to call the doctor?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered. "They said the mobile unit would be here tonight."

"Honey, tonight could mean midnight, or one o'clock in the morning. They told me they'd have to check it out before they could use it. There's no telling what time it'll be here."

"Maybe we could phone all the motels and locate Davis," Jody said desperately. "Or those doctors, you remember their names. Dr. Westley, Dr. Forrest, you told me. Maybe we could find them."

"Honey," said Eugene reasonably, "there's no time."

Another wave of pain crossed her face.

"Oh, God," she screamed.

"I've got to call him."

"I know," said Jody. "Oh, Gene," she cried, reaching for him, holding him. "What's going to happen to us, to our baby?"

Eugene just held her. He rocked her back and forth, answering her honestly. "I don't know, honey. I don't know."



At Dr. Fairchild's office, everyone was gone except the doctor and his nurse. They sat at Dr. Fairchild's desk filling out forms.

Insurance forms, government forms. Dr. Fairchild hated these mountains of forms he had to fill out every

month. He remembered the good old days. "That'll be fifty bucks," you would tell someone, and that was it.

No filling out the "patient's prior medical history" section or "further treatment anticipated" section, nothing like that. Then again, the doctor thought, when you said "Fifty bucks" to a guy, sometimes you would wait a month for the money; sometimes two months, six months, even a year. Sometimes you'd never get it, period.

There's one thing about the insurance companies and the government, thought Dr. Fairchild to himself, the corners of his mouth turning up in a tiny little avaricious grin: at least they pay. That was one thing about them, those insurance companies and the government, especially the government, they paid their bills. He smiled.

The phone on his desk rang.

The nurse picked it up. "Dr. Fairchild's office," she announced efficiently. "Yes," she said after a pause as her face went cold, "just a minute." Cupping her hand over the phone, she whispered, "It's Mr. Scott."

Dr. Fairchild went rigid. This was the call he had been dreading. For the past month it had been one thing after another. Those strange men coming in, checking his files and his medical procedures, telling him to deceive his patient, making his nurses irritable with their paranoid security precautions.

"He says she's in labor," the nurse continued, "that her contractions are coming regularly now."

"Tell him to take her to the hospital immediately," said the doctor. "Tell him I'll meet him there."

"Yes, Doctor," she answered.

Dr. Fairchild listened as the nurse repeated his orders into the phone and then hung up.

"You have his number?" asked Dr. Fairchild. "That man, what's his name?"

"Mallory," the nurse said, sure of it.

"Yes, Mallory," said the doctor, getting up wearily from the desk. "Call him and tell him we're on our way."

"Yes, Doctor," said the nurse, already dialing the number she had carefully memorized, anticipating this moment.



At the Scott house, Eugene drove his car out of the garage. He jumped out quickly and ran up the walk to meet his wife as she appeared at the front door.

"You okay?" he asked.

"I'm okay," she said, sneaking a look across the street. The same station wagon was parked there, somebody in it, crouched down behind the wheel.

"There he is," said Jody.

"I know," said her husband. "Just forget it, pay no attention."

They reached the car door. Eugene helped his wife in; then, running around the car, he got in himself.

Forgetting his own advice, he stole a look over at the station wagon. A man, not Mallory, but much like him was picking up some sort of communications phone. Eugene had seen enough; he put the car in gear and soon they were off, going to the only place they could, without Davis, without his medical unit: the hospital.

In the station wagon, the man, Gentry, spoke rapidly into the phone. "They just got in their car. They're leaving right now for the hospital."

"I know; we just heard from Fairchild," said a gruff voice. "Stay with them, make sure that's exactly where they're going. You understand?" the voice demanded.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Mallory," answered Gentry. He started up after the Scotts' car, just turning left at the corner.



In the same motel room at the Mirage Motor Inn, Frank Davis paced back and forth, smoking one cigarette after another. After each complete pace he stopped in front of the window and peered out. Business was slow tonight, the "Vacancy" sign still lighted. Only a few cars were parked in the small parking lot.

Finally, not able to stand it any longer, he went to the old-fashioned phone and picked it up.

Waiting, he said aloud, "Come on, come on."

"Can I help you?" a voice said, the same whiskey-soaked voice as that of last night.

"Would you dial 462-0713?" asked Frank.

A pause and then, "No area code?"

"No area code," said Frank, cursing under his breath. "It's a local number."

"Oh, a local call," the man repeated unnecessarily. "Why didn't ya say it was a local call?"

Frank shook his head; he would have liked to strangle the old bastard.

Now he could hear the phone ringing at the other end, over and over. "Don't seem to be any answer," said the whiskey-soaked voice in his ear. "Want me to try later?"

"No," said Frank, "never mind." Quickly he began searching through his pockets. He pulled out a card. "Get me this number, 642-3242."

"Local?" came the voice.

"Yes, local!" yelled Frank.

"Awright, awright," said the old man, dialing the number.

The phone rang. Someone picked it up on the first ring.

"Hello," said the voice.

"Dr. Westley?" asked Frank.

"Yes."

"Davis. I called their home, nobody's there. I don't know where they are. I can only assume they went to the hospital."

"The unit's just arrived; it's being checked out now," Westley shouted. "You've got to stop them."

"All right," said Frank. "I'll try. I'll meet you at the hospital, that place we agreed on."

"Right," said Westley, hanging up.

Frank put down the phone and went immediately to a bureau drawer. Opening it, he pulled out a gun, a .38 caliber. He checked to see if it was loaded and stuck it in the inside pocket of his jacket.



At the same time, Eugene, going well over the speed limit, was nearing the hospital. A quick glance in the rear-view mirror revealed the station wagon still on his tail.

Jody, in the midst of a strong contraction, nevertheless noticed his look. "He still there?"

Eugene nodded.

"Ohh!" cried Jody, exhaling as the contraction subsided.

"We're almost there," said Eugene, seeing the hospital up ahead. He was greatly relieved despite the anticipation of what he feared might happen there.



Two police cars pulled up in front of the hospital. Behind each was a special emergency truck. Out of the truck swarmed a dozen uniformed police officers, some even carrying heavy weapons — shotguns!

Already the lobby was crawling with policemen, many of them waiting by the elevators to be taken to the second floor, the maternity floor. It seemed as though a well-thought-out plan of action was being activated.

The other patients and visitors in the hospital had no idea what was going on. A police sergeant moved to the hospital reception desk, and spotting the mike for the

public-address system, asked the nurse, more in a tone of command, "May I use this?"

Before the startled nurse had a chance to answer, the sergeant grabbed the microphone. "All visitors are to vacate the premises immediately. This is an emergency," he said.



As the Scotts' car pulled up to the hospital grounds, Eugene noticed the police vehicles that had pulled out of the way, but not quite out of sight. Directly across from the front entrance, Mallory lounged against a patrol car, a thin smile on his face. As Eugene got out of the car and hurried around to help Jody, Mallory started toward them. He reached their side as Jody waited for another contraction to pass.

"May I help you?" he asked politely, smiling at Eugene.

Eugene, unable to both help Jody and carry the suitcase, relinquished the suitcase into Mallory's outstretched hand. Mallory's smile became triumphant.

Moments later, running at top speed from the parking lot, Frank Davis appeared. He arrived at the front door just in time to see Jody and Eugene Scott, surrounded by policemen, disappear into the elevator. Frank turned around and ran desperately back into the parking lot toward his car.



The elevator doors parted on the second floor, where several big nurses waited, as if having been chosen for their strength. They led the Scotts quickly down the corridor. Jody tried to focus on what was happening around her but was too absorbed in what was going on within herself. This lovely young woman was about to have her first child, and what should have been a beautiful experience was turning into a nightmare. The warm, friendly, loving faces of people who should have helped, who should have brought her baby into the world with tenderness, looked away from her now, ashamed of what they were about to do.

They're all murderers, Eugene thought, every one of them, grotesque, frightening people.

They neared the preparation room. Even the hospital seemed distorted, twisted.

"This is as far as you go, Mr. Scott," Jody heard one of the nurses tell her husband.

Then the door slammed. Jody could feel someone rolling up her sleeve. "Oh, no," she cried. Then came a sharp pain from the jab of a needle being forced into her arm. Then nothing...



Outside the preparation room, Eugene stared at the closed door. He turned. There Mallory stood, still holding Jody's suitcase.

"Thank you," said Eugene, reaching to take the suitcase.

"You're welcome," Mallory said.

Eugene looked around. Police were all over the place. "What are all these police doing here?" asked Eugene, pretending he didn't have a clue as to what was going on.

"Security, but nothing for you to be alarmed about," said Mallory, blank-faced. Lying came easily to him.

"You mean a bomb scare?" said Eugene, playing the game.

"Something like that," answered Mallory.

"Nothing to do with your being outside my house the other day?" said Eugene.

Mallory looked straight at him. "Later, Mr. Scott. Later we'll tell you all about it. Be patient."

"I bet you will. I bet you have a great little story all ready for me," Eugene snapped.

"Obviously you're in no mood to be reasonable." And then quickly, to someone behind Eugene, Mallory said, "Take him to the waiting room."

Eugene felt two strong arms grab him. As they turned him around he saw two massive policemen who led him with no great effort down the corridor.



Frank Davis was still in the parking lot. He was having trouble starting his car. He had rented it at the airport when he flew in from Los Angeles. "The last one," the guy at the rental counter had said. "Take it or leave it."

Frank had taken it, and every time he went to start it, he had to go through this. He tried again. *Varoom!* The engine turned over.

It was dark as he headed away from the hospital. Everything looked so different at night, thought Davis, making a left turn. He hoped he would remember the meeting place.

He made another left and there it was, the giant motor home, sitting incongruously in the empty street.



At the hospital, Jody had been wheeled into the medical prep room and was being readied for the delivery of her child.

“Breathe deeply now,” said the nurse.

Jody looked at her through a haze of drugs, only vaguely aware of what was going on.

“Come on now, dear,” repeated the nurse as if speaking to a small child. “Be a good girl and breathe deeply...”



Frank Davis crossed the dark, empty street. He tried the door of the mobile home. It was locked, so he knocked hastily.

“Who is it?” a voice from inside asked.

“Davis, Frank Davis,” he yelled.

The door opened and Davis climbed inside to face the anxious Drs. Westley and Forrest and their three assistants.

“They've taken her up to Maternity,” Frank said quickly.

“You're sure?” ranted Westley, wondering who he might blame.

“I'm positive,” said Frank. “I saw them getting into the elevator with Mallory.”

“With Mallory,” echoed Westley. “Then they didn't believe us.”

“No,” said Frank in protest, “I'm sure they believed us. Something else must have happened. Maybe they panicked. Maybe the baby came early.”

“Well, whatever the reason, we're too late,” said Dr. Forrest reasonably. “We'll just have to try again somewhere else.”

“Wait a second,” said Frank. “I'm going back there.” He picked up a black doctor's bag and a clipboard lying on one of the counters.

“Please, Frank,” said Forrest, “what's the use?”

“Look, let's try it,” answered Frank. “Move this unit into position behind the hospital.”

“You'll be recognized,” said Westley.

“Maybe not,” he said, moving for the door. “What have we got to lose?”

The five watched as Frank disappeared out the door. Westley was the first to react. He looked over at his colleague, Dr. Forrest.

“We're ready, aren't we, Doctor?”

“We’re ready,” said Dr. Forrest.

“Well, let's go, then,” said the impish-looking Dr. Westley. “Let's go!”



Outside, Frank checked to be sure his gun was still there as he climbed into his rented car. Hopeful, he tried the motor. No luck. Again. On the third try, it turned over and Frank Davis was off, the lights of the hospital looming in the distance.



On the second floor of the hospital, the maternity floor, Jody was still being readied for the delivery room. A flock of nurses milled around her.

In another part of the second floor, the fathers’ waiting room, Eugene was also being watched over by a very large police officer.

And in still another part of the second floor, in a small room off the operating room, Dr. Fairchild, all thoughts of his insurance forms forgotten, was scrubbing up.



In the lobby, a contingent of police was standing around, uniforms everywhere, ready for any eventuality.

One cop said to another, "Wouldn't it be a riot if it turned out to be a normal kid?"

A pretty nurse, her skirt shorter than necessary, jumped right into the conversation.

"Or twins," she said. "What if they get two of whatever it is they're looking for?"

"No problem," said the other cop. "Then we get the governor to call in the National Guard. That'll fix 'em." All three laughed. But it was an uneasy, self-conscious laugh, as if they knew what was lurking on the floor above them, getting ready to be born.



In the parking lot, the rented Pinto coughed itself to a stop in the section of the parking lot marked "Doctors Only." The attendant on duty looked over suspiciously. What doctor drives a Pinto? he wondered.

But out of the car came this harried-looking man carrying the telltale black bag. He walked with purpose toward the front door.

Must be his kid's, the attendant thought and shrugged, returning to the grimy paperback he'd been reading.



Frank Davis, head down, had almost reached the front entrance when he saw the large mobile home turning the corner and heading around toward the back of the hospital.

Now Frank was right at the front door. A policeman stepped out, blocking Frank's path.

"Sorry, sir..."

That was all he had a chance to say. Frank didn't wait for anything more.

"Dr. Fletcher," he interrupted. "Emergency." He kept on going, walking straight through the police line, ignoring them, with their badges, their guns, and their shotguns, too. Without the slightest hesitation he made straight for the elevators.

Another sergeant, off to the side, had seen Davis's hurried approach. Moving quickly to the front door, he confronted the policeman who had let him pass. "Who was that?" he asked. "I told you nobody gets in here."

"He's a doctor. Fletcher, something like that. It's an emergency," said the policeman, trying his best to cover himself.

Swearing under his breath, the sergeant moved quickly toward the elevators, where Frank stood nervously pressing the up button.

"Just a minute," said the sergeant, positioning himself between Frank and the bank of elevators.

An elevator door opened. "Going up," the elevator man called.

Frank coldly addressed the sergeant standing in front of him. "Listen, whoever you are, I've got a cardiac arrest on the third floor. Get out of my way or take the consequences."

That said, Frank, swinging his black doctor's bag, brushed quickly by the police sergeant and into the elevator. The elevator doors closed and Frank Davis was gone, off to see what he could do to save the life of the Scott baby.



In the ascending elevator, Frank was alone with the elevator operator. At two, the elevator stopped. A policeman got on, and Frank caught a quick glimpse of the maternity floor. Policemen, at least a dozen of them, were lined up and down the corridor.

"Something's going on in there," said the elevator operator, "that's for sure."

"Take me to the top floor," said the policeman gruffly.

"Top floor it is," said the elevator operator as he started the elevator again. "You want three, right, Doc?"

"Right," said Frank, keeping his head down as if absorbed in his clipboard, and as the policeman looked over curiously.

"Here we are, number three," said the elevator operator, the elevator coming to a stomach-churning halt.

"Thank you," said Frank as, head still down, he walked quickly from the elevator.

Now the nurses' station. Without breaking stride, Frank proceeded quickly past the nurse on duty. She was writing something in a ledger, and by the time she had a chance to look up, Frank was a good quarter of the way down the hall.

At the far end of the hall Frank saw a lone policeman standing guard. Apparently he was there to see that no one reached the second floor by way of the stairway. Halfway down the hall Frank moved over to the window overlooking the back of the building. The mobile unit was there, waiting! Frank had to find a way past that policeman. He looked over. The policeman had moved a step or two away from the exit door! He was reading an employees' bulletin board on which used cars, apartments for rent, and so forth were advertised.

Without hesitation Frank moved silently down the corridor, past the policeman still engrossed in the bulletin board, and reached the exit door. Silently he opened it. He stepped through and was gone.

A clicking sound as the door shut. The policeman turned. He looked. Nothing. He went back to reading the used-car ads.



Downstairs in the preparation room, Jody had been fully prepared for delivery. At the door, an intern looked in at the expectant mother. "We're ready," he said, trying to hide the excitement in his voice.

Instead of the regular orderlies, a phalanx of uniformed policemen pushed the table forward. Through the haze Jody could just make out the blue of their uniforms. She knew for sure now what they meant to do. She couldn't stand it any longer. She had to say something.

"Don't harm it," she cried as they wheeled her from the preparation room into the delivery room. "You haven't

any right! It's my baby," she sobbed, grabbing at anything, the policemen, the walls. "Please," she cried, "you can't do this!"

Dr. Fairchild stood at the rear of the delivery room, watching her, hearing her hysterical words. Jody recognized him immediately, even though the mask he wore hid almost his entire face.

"Dr. Fairchild, you're part of this!" she screamed. "How can you do this, Doctor? It's murder! Don't you know that it's murder!"

"Restrain her," said Dr. Fairchild, his eyes sad above the paper mask. "Make sure she can't move."

The policeman responded, pinning her legs and arms, leaving only her head free.

"Gene!" she screamed. "Eugene, help me! Don't let them do it, Eugene! It's murder, plain murder. They're trying to murder my child."

Fairchild turned to another doctor who has just come into the room. "We're going to have to put her out," he said.

Fairchild and the other doctor moved toward her.

"It doesn't belong to you," Jody cried. "You haven't any right. You don't know what it's going to look like. It's my baby. How can you know?"

At that moment Mallory entered, wearing a green medical gown. He heard what she was saying.

"Somebody's informed her," he said to Dr. Fairchild. "We've got to be careful." He looked around the delivery room, suspecting everyone. "Make sure," he said to the policemen, "no one gets in here you don't know... you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said the policemen, as if a chorus.

"I'm going to have to talk to the husband," Mallory said, speaking again to Fairchild. "He knows what's going on, too, whoever the hell told him," he continued, fixing Fairchild with his cold look, as if Fairchild were the leak.

Fairchild resented that look. After all he had been through, this vicious man was staring at him, implying that he was responsible for the Scotts having been told.

"You think I told, don't you?" he said, unable to control his anger.

Mallory ignored him. This was no time for personal confrontations. Destroy the baby, keep it quiet, that was his only mission. "I'll be right back," he said, leaving the room.

Dr. Fairchild — obstetrician, respected member of Tucson society, golfing partner to the richest, most prominent people in southern Arizona — looked down sadly at Jody Scott. Seven months ago this slim, beautiful girl had come to his office joyous, laughing, sure she was pregnant. She had wanted the baby, a rare wish among professional women today.

It has all come to this, Dr. Fairchild thought as he stood over her, saying soothingly to her as four policemen held her in place, "It won't be long now. Breathe deeply now, breathe."

"Please," Jody said, pleading more with her eyes than with her voice, "please don't kill my baby."

"Easy, Mrs. Scott, please take it easy," said the doctor, wondering what would happen to his career should this get out; and it was bound to get out. After all, the husband was a lawyer, of all things. What a mess, the doctor said to himself, what a mess.

FOUR

Elsewhere on the second floor, the fire door opened and Frank Davis emerged. Immediately his way was blocked by two policemen.

“Hold it,” they commanded.

“I’m Dr. Fletcher,” said Frank, his story already concocted. “Mallory called me in.”

“Sorry, nobody’s allowed in,” said one of the policemen.

“Listen,” said Frank, “Mallory called me. If you don’t want any trouble, you better get me to him quick.”

The policemen looked at each other. The first one nodded.

“All right,” he sighed, and leaving the other to guard the door, he said, “Follow me, Doctor.”

They started off down the hall, Frank following his police escort.



Eugene sat helpless in the fathers’ waiting room, the same huge policeman guarding him, watching his every move. More policemen, plus half a dozen or so orderlies, waited in the hall ready for any sudden emergency. Occasionally one or two of the orderlies whispered to each

other and peered in, sneaking a curious look at Eugene from the doorway.

Eugene looked up to catch one particularly inquisitive orderly gaping openly into the room, directly at Eugene. Seeing Eugene's look, he glanced quickly away; and just as he did, a policeman, and then Frank Davis, moved quickly by that same doorway!

Instinctively, Eugene was on his feet heading for the doorway.

"Frank," he yelled.

"Hold it!" called the burly cop, cutting off Eugene's path to the door.

Frank, hearing his name, turned, and seeing the situation, kept on going, following the other cop to Mallory, as if the cop's grabbing Eugene Scott had nothing to do with him.

An orderly, following Eugene's gaze, turned to someone next to him.

"That guy," he said, trying to get it straight in his own mind, "I've seen pictures of him." Then he remembered. "That's Frank Davis! That's Frank Davis!" he screamed.

The big cop guarding Eugene came running out of the fathers' waiting room. "Where's Frank Davis?" he yelled.

"There! Down there, by the delivery room." The orderly pointed.

Just then the delivery-room door swung open and out came Mallory.

"Sir," the policeman leading Davis began to explain, "I brought this doctor —"

"Davis," Mallory interrupted as he saw Frank Davis standing there. Now it was clear to him. Now he knew who

had forewarned the Scotts. "I had a feeling we couldn't trust you, Mr. Davis," he said.

Davis saw the other policeman running toward them down the hall. It's now or never, he thought.

Quickly he moved closer to Mallory. He held the clipboard high, in such a way that only Mallory could see the gun he now had pointed directly at Mallory's chest.

"I'd like you to look at this chart, Mr. Mallory," Frank said calmly. "Persuasive, isn't it?"

Mallory saw the gun, and with almost a chuckle he sneered back at Davis: "What do you hope to gain by all this? You know this hospital is surrounded."

"A life," answered Davis.

"You're crazy," laughed Mallory.

"Call it temporary insanity, Mr. Mallory. Now tell them to bring Mr. Scott down here to see his wife. Go ahead!"

"Mr. Davis..." Mallory protested.

"Do it," said Davis, jabbing the weapon hard into Mallory's ribs. The police now saw the gun.

Mallory turned to the policeman nearest him, who looked as if he was about to lunge at Davis.

"Hold it," said Mallory, guessing his intention. And then to the other cop, "Get Scott down here on the double!"

Davis turned to Mallory and said tauntingly — for whatever reason he hated this man, "Well said, Mallory."



In the delivery room, Jody's legs had already been placed in the stirrups and Dr. Fairchild had finished his preparations. A few minutes were all that remained.



In the mobile unit behind the hospital, Drs. Forrest and Westley waited anxiously.

The three nurses, Steven King, Billy Grant, and the girl, Barbara, peered out the large front window of the motor home, up toward the hospital.

"We could all go to jail for this," said Steven, no doubt having second thoughts about this whole operation.

"I'm not so sure," said Barbara, smiling. "We're here to prevent a murder, aren't we?"

"That's right," said Billy with a wry grin, "that's what we're doing."



In the delivery room, Dr. Fairchild was just about to begin the delivery procedure when the door burst open and Mallory was shoved in, followed by Frank Davis and Eugene Scott. Davis pointed his gun at whoever dared come close.

"Stay away from the patient, Doctor," Frank warned, suddenly swinging the gun in his direction.

"You can't do this," Fairchild protested.

Eugene moved toward his wife. "Jody," he called softly.

Jody looked up and tried to focus. She was too weak to talk.

"That's okay, honey. Everything's okay," Eugene said.

"I want you to give her a shot," Frank said to Fairchild.

"A shot!" said Fairchild. "What kind of shot?"

"A shot to retard labor," said Davis.

"Oh, of course," agreed Dr. Fairchild, looking at the gun, "of course. Nurse," he said.

The nearest nurse approached. Dr. Fairchild whispered something in her ear. Immediately she proceeded to the counter at the side of the delivery room and began filling a hypodermic needle.

"Give it up, Davis," Mallory said. "It's too late."

"Shut up," said Davis.

"Isn't it too late, Doctor?" insisted Mallory, addressing Fairchild.

The nurse returned with the filled hypodermic needle.

"Not necessarily," said Dr. Fairchild, grabbing the needle from the nurse. Dr. Fairchild saw this whole intrusion as a godsend. Shrewdly, he knew that if he could delay the birth and let someone else take over, he could be safely out of it when the time came to kill this creature. He could save himself a lot of grief and an almost certain multimillion-dollar lawsuit.

"Fairchild, you son of a bitch, don't give her that needle! You understand?"

"Don't be silly, Mr. Mallory. The drug is perfectly safe and the man is holding a gun on me," the suave doctor insisted. "Besides, I am obeying the instructions of my

patients. Do you want me to give her this needle, Mr. Scott?" Dr. Fairchild asked, looking at Eugene.

Eugene looked at his wife. She looked up at him, her eyes, despite the pain, pleading to save her baby.

"Yes," said Eugene emphatically.

Quickly Dr. Fairchild injected the drug into his patient. "There, it's done," he said, handing the empty needle to his nurse.

"You'll be sorry for this, Dr. Fairchild," said Mallory evenly.

"I don't think so." Fairchild smiled and walked away from the table. He sat down on a stool in the corner, relieved to be out of it. "I don't think so," he repeated.

Eugene unstrapped his wife, freeing her from her bondage, and Frank yelled instructions to policemen and medical people, moving them around with his gun. "Wheel that cart in here! Get her out of those stirrups! Tell them, Mallory!" he commanded.

Mallory, as if waiting his turn, now shrugged his shoulders as he instructed the policemen and the nurses to do exactly what Davis wanted. "It's his ball game," he said calmly. "Go ahead, do whatever he tells you."

"Help him," said Frank to the policemen, "help him with his wife," he ordered. Eugene, with the policemen's help, moved his wife from the maternity table onto the cart and stood ready to wheel her out of the delivery room. "All right, stand back! You ready, Eugene?"

"Ready," answered Eugene.

"All right, let's go," said Frank.

"You're committing suicide," warned Mallory. "It'll kill all of you."

“Well, don't worry about it, Mallory,” said Frank, “’cause we’re bringing you along to watch.”

Davis grabbed Mallory, and putting the gun to his head, instructed the two policemen: “Yon help Mr. Scott with the cart. Mr. Mallory is staying right with me just in case anyone tries anything. Let's go!” he ordered.

Off they went, this strange caravan, Jody being pushed down the narrow hallway toward the emergency elevator, Frank warning anyone who wanted to be a hero to “stay back,” his gun leveled at Mallory's head, using him as a hostage.

Other policemen, who had already passed them in the hallway, were now on their radios telling the policemen downstairs what the situation was. “Let them alone,” they warned. “They got Mallory. We'll take them outside the hospital.”



As the emergency-elevator doors opened, a surprised attendant stared out at the strange waiting group. There was Jody on her table, Eugene, two policemen, and behind them Mallory with a gun in his ear. Running the whole show was Frank Davis.

“Get on,” Davis said. “Everybody!”



Downstairs, in the emergency area of the hospital, two derelicts were seated on the edge of a bench, holding each other up. Obviously they had been in some sort of fight, for they were explaining to the nurse's aide that they always ended up "messing with each other when we get liquored up, we don't mean nothing by it."

Just then the elevator doors opened and out came the cart with the enormously pregnant Jody Scott on it, followed by the rest of the group. Right through the emergency section they marched, heading for the back door.

"Hey," said one of the derelicts, "look at this!"

"You can't come through here!" cried the nurse's aide.

Mallory pointed to Davis, who still held the gun to his head. "It's okay, lady, it's okay. Let them alone!"

Sure of himself, Frank knew exactly where to go. "Take her down that ramp," he said.



In the mobile home, Barbara was agitated. Big Steve, with all his muscles, was sitting there like a six-year-old child, methodically cracking his knuckles. Someday I'm going to tell that big jerk off, she thought to herself. She recalled with annoyance the trip down from Los Angeles earlier that night with Billy driving. Steve had tried to corner her in the back of the mobile home.

Suddenly the back door of the hospital crashed open. There they were, the woman on the table, the cops, Davis, two other men. "Look," Barbara gasped. Drs. Westley and Forrest came running from the back of the motor home.

Speechlessly they watched this strange procession as it moved across the empty parking lot directly toward the mobile unit.

“Incredible!” said Dr. Westley, finding his voice.

Dr. Forrest, meanwhile, had the door open just in time to hear Davis instructing the policemen.

“Lift her; the cart comes apart. Just lift her off the cart,” he ordered.

Following his instructions, the police did just that. Lifting Jody, they handed her in through the open door to the two waiting male nurses.

“Easy,” said Davis, “easy,” taking charge as if he had been doing this sort of thing all his life.

Suddenly from around the corner six or seven police cars pulled up, surrounding Davis and the motor home.

“Inside,” shouted Frank. “Hurry up.” Eugene rushed into the unit. “All right,” said Frank, “lock it up.”

The door slammed shut, leaving Frank outside alone to face the police, with Mallory still his hostage.



In the mobile unit, Steve and Billy very cautiously placed Jody on the delivery table. Dr. Forrest stood by, ready to go.

“Is she all right?” asked Dr. Westley anxiously.

“She's all right,” said Dr. Forrest.

“You’re going to save the baby, aren't you?” moaned Jody, suddenly finding the strength to talk.

"We're going to damn well try," said Dr. Forrest, smiling down at her.

Through her pain she smiled back. I like this man, she thought. I can trust him.



Outside the mobile medical unit — mass confusion. The unit was completely surrounded by police cars and armed police. The police advanced cautiously toward Frank, who still held the gun at Mallory's head. A police sergeant, the same one who had confronted Davis earlier in the lobby, seemed to be in charge. He advanced on Davis slowly, as one would approach a bomb, saying softly:

"All right, mister, put it down, put it down and everything will be just fine."

Frank stood his ground, answering, "No crime has been committed. You have no right to arrest me."

"All I know is you've got a gun, mister," said the sergeant. "That's all I'm interested in."

"I'm protecting that woman's right to have her child, that's all I'm doing," Frank said.

"Look, mister, I don't know anything about any woman's right. All I know is you can't run around a hospital, or anywhere else for that matter, holding guns at people's heads," said the sergeant. He knew he should have stopped this bastard downstairs. He should have known, he thought to himself, that this guy was a psycho.

"Take it easy, Sergeant," said Mallory. "I'll take care of this."

Who is this? the sergeant wondered. Who is this guy who has been running around Tucson the past week ordering everybody here, there, and everywhere?

"Listen, everybody..." Gun still at his head, Mallory started to speak. "You're going to hear some screams coming from in there," he said, pointing toward the motor home, "and it's not going to be pretty." He turned to Davis. "You'll be responsible for butchering a lot of people," he said, obviously referring to something he and Davis were familiar with.

Davis moved toward the front of the mobile unit, pushing Mallory with him. Reaching the door, he knocked on it heavily, and almost immediately Billy appeared at the door.

"A baby shouldn't be born in such a hostile environment," Davis said, poking Mallory with his gun. "Get in there."

Mallory looked toward the police. He spotted one of his men, Gentry, breaking through the mob.

"It's all right," said Mallory, "everything's all right. You're in charge, Gentry," adding to the sergeant, "Do exactly what he says."

Orders given, he stepped into the motor home, followed by Davis, who quickly slammed the door, keeping the gun at his captive's head.

Billy regarded Mallory warily.

"It's okay, Billy," said Frank. "I'll take care of him. You go on back, see if they need any help."

"Yes, sir," said Billy, moving toward the rear of the unit.

"Move over there," said Frank to Mallory. "Get behind the wheel."

"You'll never get away with it," said Mallory, nevertheless doing what he was told.

"I know, I know." Frank nodded. "You told me that already. Just do as I say. First of all," he said, still holding the gun perilously close to Mallory's head, "get those police cars out of the way."

Reluctantly Mallory rolled down the window. "Get those police cars out of there," he shouted down at Gentry. "All of them."

Outside, the police followed Gentry's shouted orders and backed up the police cars, clearing a path for the giant motor home.

"Okay," said Frank, "drive. Nice and smooth, though. Keep it under thirty."

"You want me to drive while they're delivering the baby back there?" Mallory asked, pointing toward the rear of the motor home.

"Why not?" said Frank. "They deliver babies all the time on airlines, don't they?"

"You're crazy, you know that?" Mallory said, starting up the huge machine.



In the back of the motor home, Dr. Westley looked up. "It's moving," he said. "The van is moving."

Dr. Forrest, without lifting his head, went straight ahead with the delivery. "It's too late now. This baby is coming right now. Oh, my God, it's enormous! You ready, Barbara?"

“Yes, Doctor,” Barbara answered. She held a hypodermic needle ready to sedate the child as soon as it was delivered. Suddenly Barbara's face went pale; she saw the child! The child, or whatever it was, was coming out!

“Oh, my God!” cried Dr. Forrest. He could not believe what he was seeing. “The needle,” he yelled at Barbara, “use the needle!”

Barbara, with all her fright, managed to plunge the needle into the baby. It seemed to work as the baby lay there, grotesque, on the table, emitting its first sound: a low moan.

“I think we've got it,” said Dr. Westley, watching this “thing,” fascinated.

Then the eyes opened slowly. The baby looked around as if at that moment, seconds after its birth, it could SEE!

The low moan was gone, and in its place was an animal GROWL. It was a singular sound, the wailing sound of a creature born to a world it does not understand, a world totally alien that wanted to kill it. Only now it had fallen into the hands of those who wished to save it. But how was the baby to know that?

The growl increased, as if it were about to attack.

“Another one, another needle,” said Dr. Forrest. “Quick.”

Barbara ran to the side cabinet. She began refilling the hypodermic needle. Then she started to shake. She dropped the needle. “Oh, my God, I'm sorry.”

“Another one,” cried Dr. Westley, panicked. “Get another one, quick!”

Barbara pulled another needle out of a drawer and began filling it.

Meanwhile Jody struggled to raise her head, trying to see what was there on the small table, wanting to know what she had brought into the world. "I want to see it," she said. "I want to see my baby."

"No!" cried Eugene, running to her, holding her, refusing to let her get up, making it impossible for her to see the baby.

The growls were getting louder and louder. Dr. Westley turned to Barbara. "Hurry," he demanded.

"Yes, Doctor," Barbara replied, close to tears.

Steven, the karate expert, watched intently, ready with his lethal hands. "We're wrong in doing this," he said. "It shouldn't be allowed to live."

"Shut up," said Dr. Westley, looking again toward Barbara.

Suddenly the creature growled as never before. The growl of an attacking animal, a desperate, piercing shriek.

"What's happening?" cried Jody, still trying to see the baby as Eugene held her down. "What's happening to my baby?"

Eugene, his head turned away, would not look at this thing. He clamped his hands over his wife's ears in a vain attempt to drown out the horrifying noise.

"What is it?" Jody cried. "What is it?"

"Please, Jody," begged Eugene, "please don't look."

Now Barbara was back with the needle.

"Give me that." Dr. Westley grabbed it from Barbara and then callously stabbed it into the creature's stomach.

Then, all at once, the growl diminished. The infant seemed to be sedated, the drug taking effect. The

grotesque body went limp. The ghoulish thing seemed to be completely tranquilized.

“Let's put it away at once,” said Dr. Westley.

Dr. Forrest, closest to the infant, bent to pick it up, but Dr. Westley moved in quickly. Clearly he wanted to be the first to touch it, handle it. “I'll do it,” he said.

Deftly he picked up the drugged baby, and wasting no time, moved to the special incubator with the bars — a cage, really, for a wild beast. He opened the incubator and, about to put the infant in, looked down.

“It's a male,” he said, turning to Dr. Forrest and the rest of the people in the mobile unit with a triumphant, proud-of-himself smile.

And then, all at once, a shriek!

Dr. Westley screamed. A clawed hand ripped across the doctor's face in a flash, tearing his cheek open as it went for his throat.

Dr. Forrest rushed forward. Armed only with a cloth drenched with chloroform, he stuffed it into the creature's face. Dr. Westley fell to the floor, leaving Dr. Forrest to grab the infant, who suddenly went limp. Barbara ran to Dr. Westley's aid, trying to stop the bleeding.

“Antiseptic, quick!” she called back to Billy.

Dr. Westley, pressing his cheek, a wild, terrified look in his eyes, yelled up at Dr. Forrest, holding the now-still infant above him.

“It was out. I could swear it was out!” he cried.

“It must have been a reflex action,” said Dr. Forrest, now quietly examining the unconscious infant with his scientist's eyes.

Billy and Barbara helped Dr. Westley to his feet. They moved him over to a stool in the far corner to care for his

torn cheek. The doctor, in shock, his eyes widened, reached up to his bloodied face and probed the gash with his hand.

"Please, Doctor," said Barbara as she moved his hand away from the ugly laceration and started to tend to it.

Dr. Westley stared across the medical unit as his colleague handled the bizarre specimen. The infant was quiet now. Look how he handles it, Dr. Westley thought, watching Dr. Forrest place the infant gently, ever so gently, as if it were a real baby, into the steel-barred incubator.

Standing by, Steven closed it at once and locked the cage tight.

"He's out," said Dr. Forrest, smiling at Steven, who carefully checked and rechecked the locks. "Just let him lie there."

Jody, still on the delivery table, had missed most of this. "What's going on?" she asked. "Where's my baby?"

"Nothing," said Eugene, standing as he had since soon after the birth, blocking her view of the creature. "Everything's all right."

"Is the baby all right?"

"The baby's fine," he lied. "Just get some sleep."

"Oh, yes... that's what I want to do, to sleep." She smiled. "Did you see him?"

Eugene turned away. He couldn't answer. He hadn't seen it because he had chosen not to look.

Jody looked up. She saw him turn away, saw the evasion in his eyes. She knew immediately. She screamed up at his averted face: "Tell me! Why don't you want to see him? Why won't you look?"

Then suddenly she dropped off in exhaustion, as if some drug taken earlier were now taking effect. Eugene

stood there, still holding her hand.

The vehicle moved smoothly, only occasionally hitting a bump.

Eugene looked away from his wife to the figure of Dr. Westley, whose dazed eyes were gazing across the room. Eugene followed his stare, right to the incubator. From this distance he could not see inside. He heard his wife's words ringing in his ears: "Why don't you want to see him? Why won't you look?"

Steadying himself, he moved slowly across the vehicle. Reaching the incubator, he leaned over and stared down at what was lying inside. He saw for the first time his child, his monster! The fangs! And the hands, each with three claws, one already smeared with the blood of Dr. Westley.

"Oh, my God! No!" Eugene cried, recoiling in horror.

Dr. Forrest watched him, his eyes sad, his mind racing. What are we doing here... are we doing the right thing, he wondered, keeping this thing alive?

FIVE

At a small, independent landing field not far from the hospital, six helicopters stood ready to go. Almost in unison they catapulted into the night sky, fanning the air in some sort of a holding pattern.

Inside what appeared to be the lead helicopter sat a young man wearing the uniform of the Arizona State Police. He was intently awaiting instructions.

The radio crackled to life. "Subject moving east on Ninety-seven."

"Got it," said the young policeman, adjusting his aircraft and moving out in the direction indicated.

Another voice came over the radio, this one older, more authoritarian. "Units close off Route One-oh-one. Under no circumstances attempt to enter the vehicle in question. Repeat, under no circumstances attempt to enter the vehicle in..."



In the mobile home, Frank Davis was now at the wheel. Mallory, still his prisoner, sat beside him, although the way Frank held the gun on him, Mallory could have overpowered him if he'd had a mind to. Mallory, however, sat there content with the way things were going, sure that everything was well in hand. He knew Davis and his partners had nowhere to go.

As if to prove him right, Davis heard the whir of the police helicopters above.

“Looks as if we’re attracting a crowd,” Mallory said, showing his thin smile again.

Davis looked out and saw the helicopters hovering above. “Why are you trying so hard to do your job?” he asked Mallory. “Why do you get so much pleasure out of it?”

“I have a very high regard for the human race,” said Mallory. “I’d like it to stick around a while longer, that’s all.”

Davis was about to say more, but a buzzer went off. He immediately picked up a speaker from the intercom system that linked the front of the mobile unit to the rear.

“Davis,” he said.

“We’ve successfully delivered a male,” Dr. Forrest’s voice announced. “Dr. Westley’s been injured, but we’ll proceed with our original plan.”

“Right,” said Davis, smiling as he hung up.

Mallory observed Frank Davis’s obvious pleasure. “You’re proud of yourself, aren’t you?” he remarked.

“That’s right,” said Davis, intent on the road. Ahead of them was a tunnel cutting through a large mountainside.

“What was that part about a doctor being injured?” chided Mallory, watching for Frank’s reaction. “How do you suppose that happened?”

Mallory was not able to see Frank’s reaction, since the front cabin of the motor home suddenly went dark. They had entered the tunnel.



Above, the helicopters had spotted the mountainside and the tunnel ahead. The young policeman was on the radio, reporting to his supervisors and at the same time instructing the other helicopters.

“We'll have to change course, fly over the mountain, and pick up that motor home when it emerges on the other side.”

“Roger,” said a voice from the main base. “Go get 'em. We got a surprise waiting for 'em just ahead.”

“Gotcha.” The young policeman smiled as he pulled back on the throttle, and the machine banked suddenly upward, climbing easily up the lofty mountain ahead.



On the other side of the mountain, not a scant hundred yards from the tunnel's exit, a police roadblock waited! At least a dozen state police cars completely blocked the road, leaving no possible way of getting through. One important-looking gentleman, who wore the uniform of some kind of officer in the state police, was definitely in charge.

“Our orders are clear,” he said. “Under no circumstances does the vehicle get through, hostage or not. If we have to lose the hostage, we lose him, that's it. Understand?”

After a chorus of mumbled "Yes, sir, we understand," the contingent of police crouched waiting for the mobile home to emerge from the tunnel. Spotlights, almost unnecessary on this moonlit night, were trained on the tunnel's exit.

They waited longer than it would normally take for the motor home to get through the tunnel.

"What the hell's keeping those bastards?" moaned the officer in charge.

"Here it comes," yelled another man, spotting a pair of headlights deep within the tunnel.

Above, the helicopters hovered, ready to pounce like giant birds.

The motor home was now emerging from the tunnel. The state police officer stepped out in front of his men, signaling the motor home to stop. The motor home crept forward until the policemen, at first wary that it might have tried to crash through the roadblock, watched with mounting impatience its slow, turtlelike approach to the roadblock. Finally it stopped!

Quickly Frank stepped out. Slamming the front door of the motor home behind him, he walked away from the vehicle and, hands in the air, dutifully surrendered as the state police moved in.

The officer took over. "This is as far as you go, mister," he shouted.

Frank nodded as if thoroughly defeated.

"Where is it?" the officer asked sternly.

Taking his time, Frank pointed toward the rear door of the motor home. "In there," he sighed.

Cautiously the police approached the door, the officer in the lead. Guns ready and edging closer, they prepared

to enter the mobile unit.

Surrounding the door, the officer asked, "Ready?"

"We're ready," answered his men.

Slowly he turned the handle; the door opened and... flew open! The figure of Dr. Westley leaped out SCREAMING! Completely in shock, oblivious to his surroundings, he fell on the police officer in a state of total collapse.

Quickly, boldly, as if in a race, the state police rushed through the open door. Guns ready, they peered in: Jody lay unconscious on the delivery table, the two male nurses and Barbara were there, but there was no sign of Eugene Scott or Dr. Forrest... nor was there any sign of the huge barred incubator. It had been removed... it was gone!



Outside, the officer finally disengaged himself from the crazed Dr. Westley and heard a persistent knocking from the front part of the motor home. Moving quickly to the front door, he tried the handle: locked. He moved quickly back to Davis.

"Who's in there?" he demanded.

Davis shrugged. "I don't know."

"Let's have the keys."

"What keys?" Davis asked innocently.

"Search him," said the officer to a policeman standing by.

Roughly the policeman went through Frank's pockets, finding the keys and handing them to the officer.

With a menacing look at Frank, the officer moved back to the front of the motor home.

Standing back, ready for any eventuality, he unlocked the van. Slowly he opened the door and looked inside. There, on the floor, bound and gagged, was Mallory.

Quickly he pulled the bandages Frank had used for a gag out of Mallory's mouth, enabling Mallory to speak.

Mallory gasped, then coughed, catching his breath. "They switched cars in the tunnel." He coughed again. "A camper. Gray. I couldn't get the license," he sputtered.

The officer, with two other policemen, now had Mallory almost completely untied. Jumping out of the camper, he met Frank Davis's smiling face. "Davis, you son of a bitch!" he stormed.

"Well, are you going to arrest me?" asked Frank, still smiling.

"You bet your sweet ass we are!" said the officer.

"I can't wait for my day in court," said Frank. "The television people should love it."

"Let him go," said Mallory, still disentangling himself from Davis's hastily applied ropes.

"Who the hell are you?" asked the officer, looking sternly at Mallory.

Mallory reached inside his jacket and took out his identification. He flashed it in the officer's direction.

"Hold it," said the officer, grabbing the wallet. He wanted to get a better look at it.

Opening it, he studied the wallet and then carried it over to another man in plainclothes. The man looked at it, nodded, and handed the wallet back.

The officer came back to Mallory. "All right, Mr. Mallory, whatever you say... it's on your neck."

"You let me worry about it," said Mallory. "Impound this vehicle. Get the information to the bureau. Trace it back."

"Yes, sir," said the officer. He began issuing orders to his subordinates at the motor home.

Behind them other police were shouting to the helicopters, which had now landed and were ready to take off again, "It's a camper, a gray camper."

Davis, standing next to Mallory, watched the helicopters taking off.

"Thanks," said Frank.

"For what?" said Mallory, also watching the helicopters.

"For keeping me out of jail," answered Frank.

"You shouldn't be in jail, you belong in a mental hospital, Davis," Mallory retorted savagely.

An ambulance had pulled up and the unconscious Jody Scott was being transferred to it in order to be taken back to the hospital. Dr. Westley was also being placed in the same ambulance. State troopers, and the officer in particular, were questioning the three nurses.

"You mean they never told you where they were taking it?" the officer asked.

"Who knows?" said Steven. "Nevada maybe, but that's only a wild guess."

"We've been instructed not to answer any questions," said Barbara, looking firmly at Steve, telling him clearly with her eyes to keep his big mouth shut.

The siren wailed as the ambulance pulled away, carrying its human cargo, Jody Scott and Dr. Westley, back to Tucson. Meanwhile, the police were going over the motor home inch by inch, searching for clues, as if this were a routine investigation.

“Look at that,” said Davis, smiling.

SIX

Daybreak. The huge sun climbed slowly over the mountains to the east, turning the desert an indescribably gorgeous red. Along a seldom used side road heading into an old mining town that had been abandoned for years, a gray camper, the one described earlier by Mallory to the police, moved slowly. Driving was the new father, Eugene Scott. As recently as yesterday a respected attorney in the booming city of Tucson, Arizona, today he had become a hunted fugitive.

In the back of the camper Dr. Forrest stared intently at the huge barred incubator, the cage for the monster child that now lived. They'd saved it, all of them, but could they tame it? Could they teach it? Could they prevent it from killing, as it seemed to be born to do?

In the middle of the deserted mining town Eugene pulled to a stop. Leaning back, he tapped on the window directly behind him. The window slid open and Dr. Forrest appeared.

"We're here, Doctor," Eugene Scott said.

The doctor nodded. He looked over to the left. "Over there," he said, "that old garage."

Following his instructions, Eugene pulled the gray camper up to the old garage, and getting out, he ran quickly over to the door of the weather-beaten garage. When he removed a plank that held the garage shut, the doors flew open. And there sat a sparkling new electric-blue van, the kind teen-agers drive, waiting in the

surprisingly clean garage. Clearly someone had been here recently, keeping it ready just in case.

Eugene entered the garage. He moved to the driver's side of the van and looked in.

The keys were there in the ignition, gleaming new. Behind him Dr. Forrest was getting out of the back of the gray camper, carrying the incubator cautiously, at arm's length.

"It's all set," Eugene yelled out to Dr. Forrest.

"Let's go, then," said the doctor, waiting.

Eugene jumped in. He started up the van. It roared to life instantly, again as if someone had cared for it recently. Eugene backed the van out of the garage past Dr. Forrest. As he did, he quickly stole a look at the incubator. He couldn't see much, but what he saw was just lying there silently, not making a sound.

He heard Dr. Forrest getting in the back of the van, closing the door. "How 'bout the camper?" Eugene shouted back to Dr. Forrest.

"Never mind," said Dr. Forrest, "they'll take care of that. Let's go."

Eugene looked up at the line of deserted buildings. A chill went through him. He was being watched and he knew it. "All right," he said to the doctor.

He drove back down the same dusty, deep-rutted road on which they had come. He swung left and then right to avoid the deep tire marks in which some unfortunate vehicle had been trapped from some long-ago flash flood.

For no reason he glanced up into the rear-view mirror. Behind him, back in the town, an old couple hobbled out from one of the seemingly deserted buildings. Helping

each other, they reached the gray camper, climbed in, and drove it directly into the garage!

Who the hell is that? Eugene asked himself.



It was hours later. Dr. Forrest was at the wheel of the blue camper, Eugene Scott asleep in the seat beside him. Suddenly the honking of horns woke him. He jumped up, looking around.

“Hey,” he said, surprised, rubbing his eyes, “I've been out for hours, haven't I?”

“You needed the rest,” said Dr. Forrest.

“I didn't think I'd ever sleep again. How's it doing?” he asked, gesturing toward the back of the van.

“Fine, just fine.” Dr. Forrest smiled.

“Shouldn't you be back there watching it?” asked Eugene, never once volunteering to do it himself.

“No, no, don't worry,” answered Dr. Forrest. “It's got its own generator, supplying its own power. Everything's working just fine.”

“What if it tries to get out?”

“We got that figured out, too.” The doctor smiled again. “Any sudden movement sets off an instant alarm. So we have the situation well in hand.”

“So it seems,” agreed Eugene. He looked out, trying to determine where they were. “Where are we going?” he asked.

“Back where it all started,” answered the doctor. “Los Angeles.”



In downtown Los Angeles it was rush-hour traffic. Thousands upon thousands of vehicles fought their way homeward through the downtown freeway complex. The traffic wasn't going one way, or two or three, but four ways! Some cars inched their way onto the Santa Monica Freeway, battling their way west toward the Pacific Ocean; others moved slowly onto the San Bernardino, the Pomona Freeway, as they cursed their way east into the San Gabriel Valley. Still others plodded their way onto the Santa Ana Freeway, heading south for Orange County; and then the rest, the blue van included, braked their way off the San Bernardino Freeway onto the Downtown Interchange, past the strange-looking high-rises of downtown Los Angeles, honking past the continual flow of traffic coming off the Harbor Freeway, and finally getting onto the Hollywood Freeway as they slowly headed north and northwest out into the San Fernando Valley.



Back in Eugene and Jody Scott's home in Tucson, Arizona, police were all over the place. They rifled through desk drawers and examined bits and pieces from wastepaper baskets, hoping to piece together some clue as to where the infant had been taken.

Jody, lying on her sofa in the living room, a handmade sort of quilt over her, watched them, especially Mallory, with a jaundiced eye.

Mallory moved across the living room in her direction. He had seen her watching him.

"You really should have remained in the hospital, Mrs. Scott," he said.

"And miss this?" she said, pointing to the mess the police had made of her home.

"I'm sorry about this," he answered. "Believe me, they'll have it all straightened up before they leave."

Frank Davis entered from the kitchen. He had heard the tag end of their conversation. "I wonder if you have a search warrant for all this, Mr. Mallory."

"No, as a matter of fact, we don't, Mr. Davis," answered Mallory, "but I'm just going into town. I'll be glad to stop by and get some judge to sign one if you wish. As a matter of fact, I could bring you along as an expert witness so you could explain to the judge just how dangerous these creatures are."

"No, that won't be necessary," said Davis, bantering with his adversary, "but since you're going into town, how about giving me a ride to the airport? After all," — sure that Mallory would remember — "I gave you a ride, didn't I?"

Mallory turned to the police. "All right," he said, "we're leaving. Put everything back in place."

Frank moved over to the couch; Jody watched him coming, a smile on her face. She was grateful to this man, whatever the outcome of all this might be.

Just then a woman who resembled Jody but with little remaining of her beauty entered the room. She was Jody's

mother. She had seen Frank talking to her daughter, telling her, "I'm leaving." Good riddance, she said to herself. She had despised this man Davis from the first. She saw this tragedy as entirely his fault. She moved closer, carrying a tray with tea and toast for her daughter.

"Where are you going?" Jody asked Davis.

"To Dallas," he said, "unless you'd like me to stay with you, help you out."

Jody's mother had reached the couch. "Haven't you done enough, Mr. Davis?" she asked.

"Mother!" said Jody, surprised not only at her mother's lack of manners but at her bluntness.

"I'm sorry," said her mother as she placed the tray on the coffee table. She turned to Frank. "You'll excuse me if I speak frankly, Mr. Davis?"

"Of course," said Frank.

"I can't help but feel my daughter would have been far better off without your intrusion into this matter, Mr. Davis."

"Mother, please," Jody said.

"I'm sorry, darling, but look at you. You here, your husband off God knows where, a hunted fugitive, harboring..." She paused as she searched for a word. "... that thing!"

"My baby, Mother, my baby," Jody said.

"Call it what you will," she said, speaking as if Frank Davis were not even there, "I still maintain you would have been much better off if this man had never come near this house."

"I'm sorry you feel this way, Mrs...." Frank suddenly realized he didn't know her name.

"Jenkins," she said, "Mrs. Jenkins, and I'm not... I'm not sorry at all."

Standing by the door Mallory had heard most of this conversation. The police had now put just about everything back into place and he was ready to leave.

"All right, that's enough, let's clear out." He turned to Davis. "You still want that ride, Davis?"

"Yes," said Davis as he crossed the room, anything to get away from the mother.

"Good-bye, Frank," said Jody warmly from her couch, wanting to let him know how much she appreciated what he had done for her.

"Good-bye," said Frank. "I'll call to see how you're doing."

Mallory watched them, suspiciously, looking for any signal between them, but Frank turned and walked out the door.

As he did, Mrs. Jenkins quickly crossed the living room to Mallory. "Good-bye, Mr. Mallory," she said politely.

"There'll be a police officer stationed outside at all times," he said, "to keep the newspaper and television people away."

"That's very thoughtful, Mr. Mallory," said Jody's mother. "Thank you."

From the couch Jody craned her neck to peek out the floor-length front window of her living room. Parked along the curb were three police cars! Jody knew one thing for sure. She was little more than a prisoner in her own home.

Outside, Mallory was getting into one of the police cars. Davis was already there, sitting in the back seat.

Wordlessly Mallory signaled the policeman to start the car.

"Where to?" the policeman asked.

"The airport," said Mallory, sitting back to enjoy the ride. He took out a pack of cigarettes, turned, and offered one to Davis.

Davis accepted. "Thanks," he said.

"So," said Mallory, "you're going to Dallas." He didn't really believe Davis, sure this was some sort of subterfuge to conceal his real intention to get back to that thing, that monster.

"Yes," said Frank, holding on to the side of the car as the young policeman took the corner much too quickly. "I'm due in Dallas tonight. I'm giving a lecture on my unique experience in fatherhood."

"I see," said Mallory, "I see. You've been doing a lot of that, haven't you, Davis? You must be picking up a couple of bucks at it, huh?"

"A man has to live, Mr. Mallory. You should know that," said Davis, teasing his foe. "A man has to make a living in this day and age. Well, look at you, for instance, look at the important job you have, running all over the country. Look at you, for God's sake!"



In the Scott house, Mrs. Jenkins was back at her daughter's side. "Now, I want you to take this and go to bed," she said, standing over her, thrusting a pill and a cup of water into her daughter's hand.

"Please, Mom," Jody protested.

"Listen, now, I didn't fly out here from Chicago on a moment's notice to be ignored."

"Mom," Jody pleaded, "I appreciate your coming, I really do. But please leave me alone."

"Now," said her mother, "it won't do you any good to dwell on this. You mustn't feel guilty."

"Mom —"

"Now let me finish. None of this is your fault."

"Mom, believe me, I'm not feeling guilty."

"That's fine, dear," she said, leaning down, patting her daughter as one would a cocker spaniel. She sat on the coffee table, looking levelly at her daughter, preparing to say something.

Jody returned her look. God, she thought, how old she looks. Is this me? Is this what twenty-five years does to you? Is this going to be me?

"Jody," her mother began, "we've always been honest with each other, so I might as well tell you what's on my mind. You've only known Eugene a few years."

"Oh, Mother," said Jody. She knew what was coming.

"No, no," said Mrs. Jenkins, "let me finish. We don't know his family or where he comes from."

"Mother, please, don't," Jody said, trying again to stop her. But Mrs. Jenkins wouldn't be stopped.

"All I know," she insisted, "is that there's nothing wrong with anyone on our side of the family. It couldn't be us. It has to be him, his side of the family."

"For God's sake, Mother, it isn't hereditary. It's happening to others. You know it is. You've never liked

Gene. Why are you trying to twist this around? Why are you trying to make me hate him?"

"You wasted your talents on him. You could've been concertmaster if you'd stayed in Chicago. Your father and I did everything for you, the finest schools..."

Jody tried to get up. She couldn't stand it any more, but she was too weak. She fell back on the couch, sobbing.

Her mother moved toward her, concerned. "Dear..."

"Mother, there's only one thing I want you to do, and that's to help me get away from them," Jody said very concisely, pointing out the window at the remaining police cars. "They'll be watching me. And sooner or later Eugene is going to want me. Our baby will need me. They mustn't be allowed to follow. Do you understand?"

"You're not talking rationally," said her mother. "That's not a baby, that's a mon —"

"Don't say it, Mother, don't say it. You're going to help me, you hear?" said Jody, on the verge of tears again. "When the time comes you're going to help me. You understand?"

"Yes, dear," cooed her mother, moving closer, patting her again like a pet dog. "All right, dear," she said, "whatever you say," agreeing with her because that was the easiest thing to do right now. "We'll do whatever you say."



The blue van had worked its way past Hollywood, out into the valley, past Universal Studios, and onto the Ventura Freeway, heading west.

“How much farther?” asked Eugene.

“Almost there,” answered Dr. Forrest. “We get off at the next exit.”

“Coldwater Canyon,” the sign read. Dr. Forrest moved over to the exit lane. Down a ramp and then left, the blue van moved quickly up a two-laned street, past a busy intersection or two, and then climbed onto a winding canyon road leading into the mountains.

Then followed a succession of turns from one winding mountain road to another, until Eugene was not sure whether this was the way to the place they were going, or whether they were doubling back, making sure they weren't being followed. Through it all, not a sound from the small passenger in the back.

Finally they topped a knoll. The houses grew more sparse, petering out completely for the last mile or so until they reached their destination: a large, seemingly abandoned estate.

“Here we are,” said Dr. Forrest. “We've leased it. It used to be a school for children of foreign diplomats. The privacy allows us to continue with our experiments.”

“Does Frank Davis know about this place?” asked Eugene.

“He found it for us,” answered Dr. Forrest. “It was one of his old clients when he first started in public relations.”

“Isn't that risky?” said Eugene. “I mean, they could trace it...”

“This whole thing is risky, Mr. Scott. You should know that.” The doctor smiled.

“Yes, I suppose I do,” Eugene said, listening again for any sound from the back of the vehicle.

Dr. Forrest pulled the blue van to a stop right beside an electric speaker. Ahead, a massive wrought-iron gate barred entrance to the grounds. The doctor leaned out his window, pressing the button of the speaker.

“Who is it?” a voice asked promptly.

“It's Dr. Forrest,” he answered. “Eugene Scott is with me... and the infant.”

Instantly the gate, electronically operated, began to slide open. So seldom had it been used recently that branches, grown up in the interim, pawed at the gate, impeding its progress.

After snapping off several branches, the gate finally opened far enough. The blue van made its way up the driveway and onto the grounds. Up the cracked concrete of the driveway, past a number of dead trees yawning at the late-afternoon sky, Eugene had his first look at the main house.

It was a gigantic Spanish mansion, located on about a dozen acres. Surrounded by a high protective fence and hidden by enormous eucalyptus trees, it was completely secluded from view, completely isolated. The strange old building, constructed probably in the 1920s, had the look of never having been fully occupied. Ivy had grown across its red tile roof, obliterating for all intents and purposes many of the windows. The grounds, too, had not been cared for recently. The lawn was overgrown, and at the far end of the property the large swimming pool was filled with leaves from the many towering trees above it. The leaves just sat there like a covering over the water; the entire area looked more like a swamp than a swimming pool, not at all an inviting place to take a swim.

Rounding the driveway, they passed swings, monkey bars, and a variety of athletic equipment that had not been

used or cared for in years.

“What a place!” exclaimed Eugene.

“Yes,” agreed Dr. Forrest. “They had to close it after a child drowned in the pool. The lawsuits for negligence put them out of business. It's been a white elephant for years now.”

Ahead, Eugene saw a number of attendants awaiting the arrival of the blue van. A large wagonlike device, a piece of hospital equipment, had been wheeled out to accept the incubator.

“You certainly don't lack for help,” said Eugene, counting the number of white-coated medical personnel waiting to assist in the transfer of the incubator.

Dr. Forrest smiled. “There are a lot of people, medically trained people,” he said, “especially in an area like Los Angeles. They spend all that time in school and end up emptying bed pans, feeding chocolate to old ladies. They're around,” Dr. Forrest continued, “just looking for a challenging opportunity like this... something different.”

“Well, it's that all right,” said Eugene, feeling better now that they had reached the place and seen how organized, how well set up, they were.

“What?” asked Dr. Forrest, breaking the van to a smooth halt.

“Different,” said Eugene, smiling. “This case is certainly different.”

“Oh, yes,” answered Dr. Forrest, returning his smile. “It certainly is.”

They stopped in front of the house. The attendants, so well prepared, hurriedly unlocked the rear of the camper with their own key! Even though there was no movement from the infant, the attendants placed the incubator on the

wagon with great care. Then, keeping it level, carried it up the steps and wheeled it smoothly inside the mansion.

Dr. Forrest and Eugene followed them up the steps, Eugene marveling at the efficiency of it all. "Your people really seem prepared," he said.

"They've had some experience."

Eugene looked at Dr. Forrest as if anticipating that the doctor was about to tell him something he hadn't expected.

"I may as well explain it now, Mr. Scott," said the doctor. "Your child is not alone here... there are others."

"Others," Eugene repeated.

"Yes," said the doctor, "other babies like yours. One was brought from Atlanta, the other was delivered here twelve days ago. The mother didn't survive..."

Eugene, coming down from his feeling of elation of a few moments before, seemed suddenly weak. "Maybe it's the trip, but I'm not feeling very well."

"Can I help you?" asked Dr. Forrest.

"No, it's all right..." he said, continuing up the steps. "I wish you had told us all this earlier."

"Do you, Mr. Scott?" asked Dr. Forrest. "Would it have made any difference?"

Eugene thought a moment. "No," he decided. "I suppose not."

They moved inside the main entry hall, where above them a giant chandelier hung down like a pendulum over their heads. From the wide Spanish staircase, circling around the entryway and forming a balcony over the main hall, bounded a tall, sorrowful-looking man with thick eyeglasses. He was Dr. Eric Perry.

Without so much as an introduction, he blurted out to the newly arrived father, "We've prepared a room for you in the west wing." And then to Dr. Forrest he said excitedly, "You should see them!"

"How are they?" Forrest smiled catching Dr. Perry's excitement.

"More alert each day, communicating! They're very much aware of each other."

"Good," said Dr. Forrest, "good!"

"And they've been quite calm," Dr. Perry continued. "I believe they trust me. My tests seem to indicate that they already possess the mental capacity of a human infant of at least eleven months!" he gushed.

Dr. Forrest was interested but stopped Dr. Perry, or else they would have been standing out there in the lobby well into the night. "Excuse me, Doctor, but Mr. Scott really has to get something to eat. He hasn't eaten anything in the past twenty-four hours. He really has to get some rest."

"Oh, of course, of course," said Dr. Perry. "I understand completely."

"No," said Eugene. "I'd like to see them."

"You're sure?" questioned Dr. Forrest.

"Yes," said Eugene. "I'm not afraid to look any more."

"You'll find they bear a striking resemblance to one another," said Dr. Perry, very excited. He knew how much a cooperative parent could mean to this project. "As if they were all brothers and sisters."

"Is one of them female?" Eugene asked, surprised.

"Exactly," said Dr. Perry smiling, his eyes dancing under the thick lenses.



Eugene and Dr. Forrest followed as Dr. Perry led them through myriad corridors stretching around the old Spanish mansion. Down through empty rooms and vacant halls they went, until they finally came to a metal staircase leading to the basement.

“It's my belief,” said Dr. Perry as their feet clanged on the steel steps, “based upon their present rate of growth, that in five or six years they may be capable of sexual activity. I pride myself in thinking that these two down here might be the very first to actually reproduce on this planet of ours.”

“Where's my child?” asked Eugene, vaguely impatient at these scientific projections. This was the first time he had used those words to describe the infant. The terminology was not lost on Dr. Forrest.

“In one of the laboratories upstairs,” answered Dr. Perry, “undergoing tests. Eventually it'll be moved down here. We find that being with the others calms them. We try to create an artificial environment for them while at the same time maximizing protective measures to assure that they won't...” Perry hesitated “wander off.”

At the bottom of the stairs was a massive steel door, recently installed, judging from the fresh cement around the edges, and built for just this purpose. Dr. Perry was about to place one of his numerous keys into the heavy brass lock.

“Dr. Perry was head of the Genetics Department of Loyola University before he joined us six months ago,” said

Dr. Forrest.

“Yes.” Dr. Perry smiled. “This was an opportunity that none of us ever dreamed could happen, a leap into the future, so to speak.”

“And suppose you’re wrong? Suppose they can't be trained or tamed?” asked Eugene, looking at the perplexed Dr. Perry. The key didn't fit; he had the wrong key.

“We’re not trying to make them pets,” replied Dr. Perry, squinting with his poor eyesight, fretfully searching for the right key.

“We want them to achieve their maximum capability,” said Forrest, smiling a little at Dr. Perry's obvious difficulty, “whatever that might be.”

“I don't know how to say what I mean, but...” struggled Eugene.

“What you’re asking is,” said Dr. Perry, irritated, then exalted — he’d found the right key — “if they don't prove compatible with the human race, what then? Do we destroy them?”

“Yes, I suppose that's what I mean,” answered Eugene, not entirely sure.

“We just don't know yet, Mr. Scott. We have to take this one step at a time. As in many scientific studies, we just are not yet ready to think about further procedures,” said Dr. Forrest.

The lock went “click.” The steel door eased open. Eugene Scott was led inside.



The room. The lights were a strange amber color. Eugene had difficulty adjusting to it. There was a strange hissing of some artificial life-support system, constantly in operation, constantly pumping, almost like the thumping of a human heart. Adjusting to the light and moving deeper in the room, Eugene caught sight of the edges of the enclosures in which the creatures were kept. They were moving around in there, two of them, close to the restraining bars, as they tried to see who had come into their place. Who was this stranger who stood at the doorway, afraid to show himself fully?

From Eugene's angle, he was able to see little more than their outline; the body, small but impossibly muscular; not covered with hair, as one would expect, but smooth, like a human. And yet they walked on all fours, with a head far too large for their current-sized bodies.

"I've named them," said Dr. Perry, looking at them fondly, moving closer to the creatures than Eugene would have liked him to be. "I suppose that's the first necessity with a child. Probably in poor taste, blasphemous, but I've called them Adam and Eve. Why not?" He smiled. "I thought it was a good joke at the time."

Suddenly, a rattling noise; for some reason the creatures were agitated. Eugene moved back, unable to control his sense of horror and fear.

"They know you're afraid," warned Dr. Forrest, looking toward Eugene.

"I know I am, too," said Eugene, laughing nervously. "Boy, do I know it!"

"Your fear seems to threaten them," said Dr. Perry.

He turned to the infants, and as if they were already small children, he explained, "It's all right, it's all right now. He's the father of one just like you. You're going to

have a new brother. He's here and he's safe." He pointed to Eugene, who stood discreetly by the doorway. "And this is his father."

The creatures, pressing as close as they could to the sides of the cages, peered out at Eugene.

"They've never seen any of their parents," Dr. Perry told Eugene. "Probably never will. They might like to focus upon you as a father figure."

"Never mind," said Eugene, smiling nervously. "I wouldn't want to rob you of that role, Doctor."

Not for a second did Eugene take his eyes off these monstrosities who stared out at him from their cages.

Suddenly there was a sharp growl from one of the cages, as if one of the infants were warning the other.

"Now, enough of that," said Dr. Perry immediately. "We know you can make noises. It only frightens people all the more and makes them suspicious of you. I'm not going to let you out today if you don't behave."

Dr. Perry seemed to have trouble with his thick-lensed glasses. He kept fussing with them and adjusting them, taking them off, wiping and putting them back again. On several occasions he had come dangerously close to the two enclosures that housed the creatures.

Eugene watched him, wishing again he would stay farther away from the cages. "You let them out?" he asked.

"Only Adam, so far. And then I'm always armed. I've never seen them as agitated as this, though," he said as he looked at them keenly. "Right, Doctor?"

"I think you're right," said Dr. Forrest.

"We may have to tranquilize them," said Dr. Perry thoughtfully. He then turned to Eugene as if dismissing him, anxious to get on with his work. "You can come back

to see them again. Tomorrow, if you like," he said, turning back to the cages.

"Great," said Eugene, "great." He was just as pleased to get out of there.

As Dr. Forrest led Eugene out of the room and back up the staircase, Eugene turned and looked behind him. Dr. Perry was again dangerously close to the cages, smiling, chatting inaudible little nothings to those creatures as one would to any small child.

SEVEN

The room was small and boxlike; probably a maid's room when the old mansion had been at its height. The paint was a murky white, dry, crinkling at the edges. The room itself was poorly furnished, everything makeshift. There were two small, narrow beds, more like pallets.

In one of them, under a worn, weathered quilt, was Eugene Scott. Arms behind his head, in lieu of a pillow, he lay there, staring fixedly at the ceiling.

Finally, giving up all pretense of even trying to get to sleep, he got up, went to the window, and looked out.

The grounds were eerie, overgrown, deserted — and always the swimming pool in the middle, with the leaves still falling as a warm night wind blew through the giant eucalyptus trees.

Eugene looked up. He heard something, something deep within the belly of the old building — a growl. Again, louder this time, and then all at once it was gone... Just silence.

Are these creatures good or evil? Eugene wondered. His own child — was he doing the right thing, or was he being seduced by his own good intentions into something incredibly evil?



And in another bed, hundreds of miles away in Tucson, Jody Scott couldn't sleep, either. She stared at the walls, then across at her mother, asleep beside her in the giant bed. Jody turned away. She stared straight ahead, watching herself in the mirror.

"Where are they?" she moaned softly. "Where are they?... Oh, Gene..." she cried, almost soundlessly.



And much later that night, in another part of Tucson, an irate Mr. Benjamin Mallory was on the phone in a makeshift office.

"What do you mean, you lost him?" he roared.

"I lost him," the voice explained. "I lost Davis. I had him up until the time he was supposed to give the speech, then I don't know. He must've skipped. He never even showed up to make the speech."

"Find him," yelled Mallory. "You hear me? Get the Dallas police to help you."

"I already have," said the voice. "They have his picture. They're watching all the airports, the bus stations, everything."

"They better be, for your sake," stormed Mallory.

"I don't understand it," the voice tried to explain. "We had a tail on him all the time. He must have known it. He didn't skip away on his own. This boy had help."

"Of course he had help!" shouted Mallory. "Right now he's probably with Eugene Scott, and that thing!" He slammed down the phone.

“Stupid bastard,” he said to no one in particular.

Gentry approached him, coming from the outer office. “Our friend is outside,” he said, smiling.

Mallory nodded. “Good, send her in.”

A moment later Jody's mother, looking quite tense, was ushered into the office. Mallory got up and courteously guided her to a chair.

“Mrs. Jenkins,” he said, “how nice of you to come. Were you able to get any rest?”

“A little,” she answered with an anxious smile. “I'm sorry I'm late. I had to wait until my daughter fell asleep.”



In the library of the Spanish mansion in Los Angeles, Dr. Perry, Dr. Forrest, and several other physicians and attendants who ran the establishment were sitting around a huge table, in the midst of a conference of some sort. Among them were the three nurses from the motor home, Steven, Billy, and Barbara. By instruction, these three had secretly made their way back to the old mansion from Tucson.

Dr. Forrest was speaking. “They seemed to have rejected Mr. Scott.”

“Yes, they have,” said Dr. Perry. “There seems to be no doubt about that. If, however, we could have the mother as well, the complete family unit...” He paused. “We know from Frank Davis's testimony that these infants have a unique affinity for their own parents. They seek them out,

need to be close to them. What we must do is train the parents to conduct the experiments.”

“You want to bring the mother here?” asked one of the other doctors.

“Exactly,” said Dr. Perry.

“That could be very dangerous,” said the doctor. “I'm sure she's being carefully watched.”

“Doctor?” Dr. Perry turned to Dr. Forrest as if he wanted him to explain something.

Dr. Forrest nodded. “Yes, she is being watched very carefully. However, we are already working on a plan that we are sure will work.”

“How sure?” asked the same doctor cynically.

“Reasonably sure, Doctor,” replied Dr. Forrest.



The next day, in a shopping center on the outskirts of Tucson, in a huge new supermarket still flying the “Grand Opening” banners, Jody and her friend, Lydia, made their unhurried way through the well-stocked market.

Each took a cart and, side by side, started casually up an aisle.

“And that's all he said?” whispered Jody, leaning as close to Lydia as she dared without appearing obvious.

“That was it,” answered Lydia just as softly. “I got a call at three in the morning, it must have been. Woke me up, scared the shit out of me.”

Jody smiled in spite of herself.

“ ‘Lydia,’ the voice said. “No ‘Mrs. Hogan,’ nothing. Just ‘Lydia.’ Oh, God, I said to myself, it's finally my turn. I finally got it, an obscene phone call. ‘Yes,’ I said, and lay right back all ready for it. What the hell, it couldn't be any worse than that rotten-mouthed bum I was married to.”

Jody smiled again. She loved Lydia. What would she have done if she hadn't met her the very first day she and Eugene arrived in Tucson?

“So then the voice said, ‘Do you have a friend, Jody Scott?’ ‘Sure,’ I said, ‘I have a friend, Jody Scott.’ And then he said, ‘Bring her to the new Miller Brothers’ market in the Valley Plaza tomorrow at eleven o’clock.’”

Lydia stopped. She looked over at Jody.

“That was it?” Jody asked.

“That was it,” repeated Lydia.

They were silent, Jody thinking.

Coming down the aisle was the bumptious-looking assistant manager of the store. Lydia spotted him a good fifty yards away.

“Oh, God,” she said, “here he comes. I've been here three times since it opened, and every time I come in this ass of an assistant manager tries to put the make on me. There must be a sign on my back,” Lydia sighed, “saying I'm divorced and desperate.”

“How did he know you were divorced?” Jody asked suspiciously.

“Oh, well,” said Lydia evasively. “I had to cash a check, and you know, to do that they ask you all kinds of things.”

“Yes, yes, I can just imagine.”

“Hi, Lydia.” The man smiled from a few steps away.

“Mike,” Lydia said, almost shyly, “this is...”

Mike interrupted. "I know Mrs. Scott." He looked at Jody. "Would you follow me, please?"

Jody, too surprised not to, followed the man across two aisles, heading for the office of the store, as Lydia looked on in surprise.

As they neared the office, the manager appeared, coming down the steps from the office.

"Mrs. Scott?" he said, as if making doubly sure.

"Yes," said Jody.

The manager handed her the phone. "For you," he said.

"Thank you," she said, and then into the phone, her heart beating wildly, "Hello?" She was sure it was Eugene. Somehow he'd arranged all this, found this method of getting in touch with her.

"Hello," the voice said back, a flat voice, not Eugene's. Oh, no, she thought, her heart falling. It's not Eugene. It's probably some newspaper reporter who had found out she was here.

"Listen carefully," the voice said. "Is anybody around?"

Jody looked. The manager was back in his office.

The assistant manager was gone, too, back talking to Lydia.

"No," said Jody.

"Good," said the voice. "I can only tell you once. If you want to see your husband and child, do exactly what I tell you. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes," pleaded Jody. "Oh, yes. What should I do?"

"All right," said the voice. "Tonight at eight o'clock go to..."



Jody was driving. Her mother was next to her in the passenger seat. Jody couldn't help smiling in spite of herself at how easily her mother had fallen for it.

"The movies, what's playing?"

"That's Entertainment, Part Two, Mother."

"Oh, perfect, perfect, just what you need. I wanted to see that myself."

The theater was just ahead, one of those multiples, with three or four theaters in the same building.

They parked the car. A weekday night, a slow night for the movie business, plenty of parking places.

They headed for the theater ticket window. Her mother insisted on paying.

"Mother, please."

"No," said Mrs. Jenkins. "My treat."

"All right," said Jody. She smiled to herself. She actually felt a little lightheaded, so excited at what she was about to do.

Watching as her mother bought the tickets, she felt for the roll of bills she had hidden in her handbag.

Let her pay. I'll probably need all the money I can get, she thought.

Crossing the lobby, Mrs. Jenkins stopped to ask Jody, "Do you want some candy?"

"No, Mom."

"I think I'll get a little something."

Jody smiled again, remembering as a child sharing candy with her mother at the movies.

"Ready," said Mrs. Jenkins, the package of Crystal Mint Life Savers already open, the first one, round and clear, with the famous hole, disappearing into her mother's pursed mouth.

Mrs. Jenkins sat enthralled, watching the screen. It was the sequence featuring Fred Astaire, Jack Buchanan, and Nanette Fabray singing a number called "Triplets."

Jody was watching a small, lighted clock just to the left of the screen, with the name "Bogle Brothers Jewelers of Tucson" engraved around the edges. Ten minutes after eight, it read. Jody wasn't listening to the music coming from the screen. She heard only the voice she had heard on the phone earlier today, over and over again.

"At eight-fifteen, slip out the fire exit on the south side; at eight-fifteen, slip out..."

Suddenly panic seized Jody. Could the theater clock be wrong? Squinting in the darkness, she checked her own watch.

Eight-ten. Oh, thank heavens, she thought.

"What's the matter?" whispered her mother.

"Nothing," said Jody. She started to get up.

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"I'm fine," whispered Jody. "I'm just going to the ladies' room."

"I'll come with you," Mrs. Jenkins offered.

"I won't forget to wash my hands," Jody said, smiling. "Please, Mom, watch the movie."

She started up the aisle. There were only a few other people in the theater, their faces lit by the light coming from the screen.

Two rows from the back, Jody saw him, sinking low in his seat as he saw her coming up the aisle. There he is, she thought, squashing a smile. It was Gentry. She didn't know his name, but she knew who he was. She'd seen him almost constantly the last few days, wherever she went. Today in the supermarket, tonight when her mother was buying the candy, standing by the water fountain, making believe he was having a drink of water.

As Jody passed him, Gentry turned and watched her. Then he got up and moved to the end of the row. From this point he watched her enter the ladies' room. Satisfied, he sat down in the end seat and turned back toward the screen.

Inside the ladies'-room door, Jody paused. Then, quietly, she reopened the bathroom door and looked out. There he was! She could see the back of Gentry's head sitting in the end seat, watching the movie.

Quickly, noiselessly, she was out the door, heading for the fire exit to her left. There she eased up on the handle and the door sprang open with what seemed a deafening clang. She turned, holding the partially opened door. Gentry was still there, looking straight ahead, watching the movie.

"Thank God," Jody sighed. She eased the door just enough to let herself out and closed it quietly behind her. Then she stepped carefully into the dark alleyway.

Suddenly a shriek! A terrible shriek! She looked up, terrified. It was a car! As a shiny black sedan pulled up directly beside her, the door was thrust open.

"Get in," a voice instructed evenly.

Jody paused only an instant, momentarily losing her nerve.

“Come on,” the voice demanded urgently.

The fire door behind her burst open. Jody, terrified, jumped into the car.

Out of the door came Gentry, yelling, “Stop!”

The car, lights out, pulled out into the night. The frantic Gentry ran down the alley in pursuit, trying to get the plate number, the make of the car, anything.

Too late! The car was gone; turning left at the corner, it disappeared into the night.

Gentry ran back toward the theater. At the exit door he ran headlong into a young usher who had come over to see who had left the fire-exit door open.

“Where's a phone?” shouted Gentry.

“Hey,” said the usher, “you can't come in here.”

“Outta the way, kid,” said Gentry, pushing the youth aside. “Where's the phone?”

“Over there,” said the usher, moving aside and pointing to the pay phone on the far wall. This guy means business, he said to himself.



Minutes later, Mrs. Jenkins appeared in the lobby. Calmly she looked around, found what she was looking for, and started across the carpeted floor.

Gentry was on the phone, frantically explaining to his boss when he felt a soft tap on his shoulder. He turned,

startled.

"Excuse me," she said. "I'm Mrs. Jenkins, Jody Scott's mother."

"Yes, ma'am," he answered, "I know."

"Who are you talking to?" came Mallory's irate voice from the receiver.

"Mrs. Scott's mother," Gentry said into the phone.

"Put her on," roared the voice from the receiver.

Mrs. Jenkins, smiling, took the phone offered to her by Gentry. "Yes," she said, "Mr. Mallory?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the voice, suddenly very polite. "Mrs. Jenkins?"

"Yes, it is," she answered. "It's all right, Mr. Mallory. I put it in her handbag before we went out tonight... There's one thing about Jody, Mr. Mallory," said Mrs. Jenkins with a smile, "she never could fool her mother."



At the edge of town, the shiny black sedan pulled up to a pump at a busy Phillips 66 station. A long-haired young attendant approached the car on the driver's side. "Fill it up?" he said.

"I got her. This is her," said the driver of the shiny black sedan.

The attendant looked closely at Jody Scott, as if someone had showed him her picture and he was now making sure she was indeed the same Jody Scott.

Satisfied, he said to her simply, "Go into the office. Pretend you're buying some cigarettes or something." Then he moved to the back of the car and began filling it with gas.

Jody, confused, looked over at the driver of the car. He stared straight ahead, as if he hadn't heard a word the gas-station attendant had said.

"Should I?" Jody asked this man.

"Yes," said the driver abruptly, making it clear he'd be more than relieved to have Jody out of his car.

Jody got out, and carrying her large handbag, walked quickly toward the office.

A bell sounded as Jody entered the office. A man seated at an old wooden desk looked up from some paper work he'd been doing.

"Can I help you?" He smiled, seeing it was a pretty, young woman.

"Oh, I, er..." stammered Jody, not prepared for that question. She was sure someone would be here to tell her what to do instead of to ask her questions. "Oh," she said, starting again, "I er, wanted to get some cigarettes."

"A pretty little lady like you smoking cigarettes," admonished the man in a friendly voice.

"Well, they're not really for me," Jody said, reaching into her handbag for some change.

Then, to her right, through a door in the repair area of the garage, Jody heard the roar of a well-turned engine.

Startled, she saw a sleek sports car in one of the service bays start up, the driver putting on the lights. Then the driver leaned across the front seat, calling out the passenger side, the side nearest Jody, "Mrs. Scott?"

"Yes," said Jody.

"Get in, please," he said.

Jody looked toward the man at the desk. His head down, he was doing his paper work as if he hadn't heard a thing.

Jody got quickly into the car. As she did, the back door of the garage sprang mysteriously open; the car took off smoothly out the back door and into the night.



That particular night, on every single road and highway leaving Tucson, an unmarked police car sat waiting. Some of them were Fords, some of them Plymouths, some of them Chevys, but they all had one thing in common — each of them, without exception, had a large antenna on the roof, poised and waiting. Waiting to pick up a signal from the transmitter Mrs. Jenkins had put in her daughter's large leather handbag.

In a 1974 Plymouth Fury parked on a small highway heading out of Tucson, a policeman heard something. He turned to his partner. "I think that's it," he said, listening carefully.

"Sure is," said his partner, grabbing the speaker of the police radio.

"Car Twenty-two, this is Granger. Come in, please."

"Go ahead, Twenty-two."

"We got it," said Granger. "West on Highway Thirty-two." The signal was getting stronger.

A sports car, sleek and low to the ground, roared by, the signal even louder. "There it is," cried the other policeman. "That's it, the sports car!"

Mallory's voice came over the police radio. "What is it, what's going on out there?"

Granger started the car and handed the microphone to his partner.

The partner, over the noise of the car engine starting up, yelled into the speaker. "This is Car Twenty-two. We have a, looks like a Datsun Two-eight-oh Z that's giving off the signal, heading west on Highway Thirty-two. Over and out."

At police headquarters Mallory, at the police radio, was yelling into the speaker.

"Not over and out! You hear me, Car..." He stopped. Feverishly, he looked down at the woman who operated the police radio. "What car is that?" he asked.

"Car Twenty-two," she answered snappishly, not happy that Mallory had the speaker instead of her.

"Car Twenty-two," Mallory repeated, "not over and out. Come in, you hear me?"

"Yes, sir," came the scratchy voice of Granger's partner, the roar of the car engine making the transmission more garbled.

"Do not intercept. Do you hear? Do not intercept. Stay close enough to keep receiving the signal, but back far enough so that you are not detected, you understand?" Mallory said, very deliberately.

"Yes, sir," said the voice, the transmission even more indistinct now.



Hours later, after frequent subsequent reports from the pursuing police car, Mallory stood at a huge map of the southwestern portion of the United States. A set of pins had been placed on the map to designate the route Jody had taken. Mallory, with a pointer and a big smile on his face, was going over the route with his staff.

“They changed motor vehicles here,” he said, pointing to a section in downtown Tucson, “and here,” pointing to a section just west of the California-Arizona border, near Blythe. “It seems clear where they’re headed. I’m catching a flight to Los Angeles this afternoon. I think,” he said, with an even bigger smile, “we can close up shop here in Tucson.”

“Yes, sir,” mumbled the assorted police personnel around him. All of them would be damned glad to be rid of him.

EIGHT

Night. The high fence, the giant eucalyptus trees, silhouetted against the dark sky. A sign that read, "KEEP OUT — NO TRESPASSING."

In the background, a few lights burned in the distant turrets of the old Spanish mansion.

Suddenly a creak and the fence began to open. A car drove in and started up the driveway. Just before reaching the house, it turned off and headed down into a grove of trees, parking almost out of sight.

A figure got out, started up toward the house. The figure had been there before; it knew exactly where it was going.

The figure climbed a stairway past a small porch light. It was Frank Davis!



In the same woeful room Eugene had earlier, made even sadder at night by a dreary unshaded lamp, Eugene sat on his bed. Frank Davis sat across from him on a rickety chair.

Frank was saying: "Your boy seems to be getting along quite well with the other two. Dr. Perry tells me they have a unique affinity for one another."

“I wonder what kind of affinity they'll have for us,” Eugene said thoughtfully, “when they don't need us any more.”

“Should we expect them to be any more merciful than we are?” asked Frank.

“I guess I'd better make myself very useful to my son. Indispensable, as a matter of fact,” Eugene said, getting to his feet with a small smile.

There was a sharp rapping at the door and Frank, closer, went to open it.

Dr. Forrest appeared, smiling. “Well, Eugene,” he said, “it seems you have a visitor.”

He stepped aside and Jody stood there. She ran to Eugene — ran into his arms. He kissed her softly on the mouth. She buried her head in his shoulder.

“Oh, Gene!” she cried.

“How did you get here?” Eugene asked. “How did —”

“Never mind,” she interrupted, “never mind, I'll tell you all that later.”

Frank backed toward the door.

“I'll see you both at breakfast,” he said.

Jody turned, anxiously looking past Frank at Dr. Forrest standing by the door.

“When do I get to...”

Dr. Forrest stopped her, anticipating her question. “In the morning,” he said. “You wouldn't want to wake him up now, would you?”

“No,” she answered, feeling selfish. “I guess I wouldn't.”

"You'll get to hold him, feed him, even teach him, both of you," said Frank. "You'll see, Eugene, you'll change your mind."

And then Frank and Dr. Forrest were gone, leaving Jody and Eugene alone for the first time since the bizarre birth of their child in the mobile medical unit a week or so earlier.

Eugene went to her, wrapped her again in his arms, burying his face in her beautiful dark hair. Jody looked straight ahead at the closed door.

"What did he mean?" she said.

"Huh?" said Eugene, working his way around to her delicious mouth.

"About your changing your mind."

"Oh, nothing," said Eugene.

Jody stopped him. "No," she said to her husband, who was getting ready to kiss her again. "How is he, really?"

"Big. He's very strong," said Eugene vaguely. "There are two others here, you know."

"Yes," said Jody. "They explained that to me on the way. I think that's good. I mean, to know that he's not really different, that there are others."

"Sure," said Eugene. Enough of this. He'd been through these philosophical discussions all week — whether it was better to have one, to have four, to have fifty. Who cared? His wife was there. He wanted his wife. "Come here," he said.

He took her into his arms; he kissed her. After a moment, she struggled, pulling away.

"I wasn't allowed to pack any clothes," she said. "I don't have anything to sleep in."

"Terrific," said Eugene, smiling a lascivious smile.

He unbuttoned her blouse, button by button. He buried his face in her breasts, still large from the birth of the child.

"No, you'll bring milk."

"Great," he said, grinning up at her.

She forced a smile, turning away quickly. Then she turned back, inspecting the room. "Where can I wash up," she asked "and take my makeup off?"

"What's the matter, honey?"

"It's too soon," she said, going to the window, looking out. "It's too soon to do anything, you know that."

"I don't want to do anything," he said, following her to the window. "I just want to hold you, honey."

"I can't," she said. She turned away again, recoiling from his touch.

Eugene saw her revulsion. "Does it make you sick," he asked bitterly, "when I touch you? Does it?"

"No," said Jody, protesting, "no."

"Because together" — he pointed downward, toward the floor, toward the cellar below — "we created that?"

"No, Gene, no."

"Tell me the truth."

"I don't know what the truth is," she said, leaning forlornly against the thick wall, hoping for some coolness. Oh, it's so hot, she thought. "I just... I just don't want to be held. I thought I would, all the way coming here, I couldn't wait, and then... I don't know how to say it. I just don't want to..." Almost silently, she added, "That's all."

“Okay,” said Eugene, dismissing her. He turned away. “We’re lucky there are two beds.”

“I want it to be the same,” Jody pleaded, “believe me, Gene. But it isn't.”

“How could it be?” said Eugene, sitting faced away from her on one of the pathetic little beds. “After what happened... we'll never be the same people again.”

Jody looked around again. For the first time she saw the other door. She went to it, opened it. The bathroom. Oh, why didn't I see this earlier? she thought unreasonably. Then maybe I wouldn't have said the things I said.

She went inside, closed the door. She turned on the water, and taking a tiny sliver of dirt-encrusted soap, left there since God knows when, she rubbed it over and over from hand to hand, trying to work up a lather.

Suddenly the water, dingy before, turned a dark, lumpy, rust-colored brown, as if some obstruction deep within the plumbing of the building had worked itself loose through the antiquated pipes and was now spewing itself out into Jody's cupped hands and into the sink below.

She started to cry. Quietly at first, then deep, stomach-wrenching sobs as she sank slowly to her knees.

At the door behind her, she heard, “Jody?”

“I'm all right,” she sobbed. “I'm all right.”



In the room, Eugene moved over to the window. He looked out, watching the outline of the eucalyptus trees

against the night sky, bending gracefully in the heavy winds. These strange winds. Eugene had never felt winds like these before. Winds, especially summer winds, were always appreciated, hoped for, where Eugene came from; like the cooling winds off Lake Michigan on a hot night in Chicago.

These were different. Strange, hot winds. Even the contradictory term Santa Ana winds, as Dr. Forrest called them.

Strange, very strange. There they were bending those giant eucalyptus trees, sending their wax-like leaves floating down to the swimming pool below.

Eugene turned. He moved soundlessly to the bathroom door. More sobs, but softer; Jody was now getting control of herself.

"There's an old bathrobe on the hook behind the door there," Eugene said.

"I see it, thanks," answered Jody, trying her best to hide her sobs.

He moved back to the window. He looked out again. The swimming pool. Sitting there, always sitting there, waiting for something to happen, as if it had a part to play in Eugene and Jody's lives.

And down below, in the bowels of the building, in the basement where the three newborn babies were being kept in protective captivity, Dr. Perry was making his nearsighted way down the clanging steel steps.

Halfway down he heard a growl, louder, he thought, than usual.

Passing through the open steel door, he nodded to the male nurse, Steven King, as he looked over at them. "They're restless tonight," he said.

“Sure are,” said Steven. “Look at them, look how they’re moving around.”

Dr. Perry watched the three of them as they moved back and forth in their enclosures, agitated, more like caged beasts than children.

“What's the matter?” he asked, moving closer. “What has happened to upset you so?”

“The mother arrived a while ago. They've been hysterical ever since,” said Steven.

“That explains one of them,” said Dr. Perry, moving even closer, peering into the cage, “but three of them... I don't know... Oh, well,” he said, turning to Steven, “you get some rest. I'll baby-sit now.”

“Not much chance of sleeping in this heat,” Steven said. “Maybe I'll grab me a cold shower.”

Steven left. The door clanged shut after him and Dr. Perry was left with the three creatures. He looked again at them, adjusting his precious glasses as he did so. Without those glasses he was almost blind.

“Yes,” he said, watching them knowledgeably, appraisingly, picking out the Scott baby, “you know your mother's here. You know she's just upstairs. But what about you others?” he asked, turning to the other male and the female. “What are you up to? What are you trying to tell me?...”



Outside the gate, where Eugene Scott had first seen the house, a small army of parked cars stood waiting.

A number of local officials, policemen, and plainclothes detectives were standing around in small groups, talking quietly.

Off to one side was Mallory. A set of binoculars up to his face, he had them trained on the grounds ahead.

A tall, redheaded man in a brown suit stepped forward. He moved easily, like a former athlete who had grown too fond of beer.

He was Detective Lieutenant Daniel Perkins. He had been the leader of the manhunt and what had turned out to be the execution of the first baby, the Davis baby, two years ago. The natural choice of the chief of police to lead this mission.

Impatient and clearly annoyed, he moved over to Mallory, who was still looking through the binoculars. "Listen," he said, "the time to move is now, before they realize we followed her."

"No, no," said Mallory, "we can't be absolutely sure the baby's here yet. It may still be on its way from another location."

"Look, Mallory," said Perkins, looking at those damned binoculars still glued to Mallory's face — what the hell could he see this late at night? — "I'm going to have to overrule you."

"What?" said Mallory. That brought the binoculars down. Perkins smiled.

"This is my jurisdiction here. I'm going to..."

Mallory interrupted. "Overrule me," he ranted. "You can't overrule me!"

"Listen, Mallory, I don't know what kind of clowns you've been dealing with. I heard what happened to you in Tucson, how you let that 'thing' get away."

“That was an accident,” said Mallory testily.

“Yeah, you call it what you want,” said Perkins, just as testily, “but I'm responsible for the safety of this city, not you. We go tonight.”



Jody had finally come out of the bathroom. She stood looking at her husband, lying on the small, narrow bed like a little boy, his face to the wall.

“I'm sorry,” she said.

“Never mind,” he answered softly, his voice muffled.

“Trouble is, I don't know what I'm sorry for,” she said casually, trying to lighten the situation.

Nothing from Eugene; he just lay there.

Jody shrugged. “Well,” she said, looking for her handbag, “now where is that... oh, there it is! At least I had the good sense to sneak a toothbrush for my travels.”

She emptied the handbag, sending a clatter of this and that and everything else spilling out over the small wooden dressing table.

“Now where is that darn thing?” she said peevishly, searching through keys, a wallet, Kleenex, boxes of eye shadow, tubes of lipstick.

Behind one particular tube of lipstick was a small toothbrush, the fold-up kind, like those sold in machines at airports.

“Oh, there it is,” said Jody. She picked it up and, about to head back toward the bathroom, noticed another tube

of lipstick. She looked at it strangely, as if it didn't belong there. She picked it up curiously.

"I wonder whose this is?" she said aloud. Then she shrugged, put it down, not bothering to open it, and started back toward the bathroom again. "Must belong to Mother," she said, answering herself.

Eugene, still lying on his bed, heard Jody in the bathroom brushing her teeth. He rolled over. He saw his wife, part of her, that is, through the partially opened door. She was wearing the bathrobe, that was all, nothing else. It was quite short, revealing a good part of her breathtaking legs.

Eugene sighed. He heard the winds flapping against the old wind-up-type shade and looked again at the window. Those winds, he could not get over those hot winds, blowing as they were, incessantly. He felt himself breaking into a cold sweat, a clamminess that only accentuated the feeling of nausea he had now that his wife had rejected him.

He heard her; she was coming back into the room. He rolled over, facing the wall again.

Now she was in the room. She moved back toward the dressing table. Again she picked up the lipstick. "Whose could this be?" she wondered aloud. She began to twist the cap, trying to open it, but it wouldn't come off.

Eugene, in bed, listened to her going on about the lipstick. Talking about it because she couldn't bear to talk about what they really must talk about, that 'thing' in the basement. Finally he could stand it no longer; he blurted it out. "What do you care whose lipstick it is? Turn the light off, please."

A pause, then he heard the lipstick being replaced on the table.

“Oh,” she said, “I'm sorry.” She went to the wall light switch and turned it off.

He heard her padding back across the floor in her bare feet, lying down on the other bed. The words “I'm sorry” formed on his lips, but he couldn't say them; why should he, what was the use?...

The lipstick sat there, throwing off a faint glow in the dark room. If she had kept at it, if Eugene hadn't said anything, with one more twist Jody would have had the top open. She would have seen what it was: an electronic transmitter with a “sending” radius of up to ten miles. The device that was responsible for leading Mallory and the large contingent of Los Angeles police to the position they were in right now — not fifty yards away from the room occupied by Eugene Scott and his wife.

NINE

Outside, special Los Angeles Police units, armed to the teeth, piled out of vans, taking up their positions along the fence of the estate. Behind them at least a dozen police cars sat waiting. This was to be a massive assault on the old Spanish building.

The police had been forewarned as to what this creature could do, what it was capable of, how dangerous it was.

What they did not know, however — had no possibility of knowing — was that in that dark, lurking house up ahead there was not one, but three of these creatures. No one had told them that.



And in the basement of the dark house, Dr. Eric Perry took a small .22 caliber pistol from a cabinet high on the opposite wall.

Placing it in his pocket, he said aloud, “Can't be too careful,” as he moved, smiling, over to his charges.

Switching on a tape recorder, he set out a bell, a buzzer, and some numbered wooden blocks on the experiment table at the end of a huge maze.

Then he took his set of keys from his pocket, and moving toward the enclosure, said, “All right, it's lesson

time.”

From the cage, from the three of them, came a low growl.

“Come on,” said Dr. Perry, “all of you. As long as you’re up we might as well not waste the night. Let's watch Adam go through the maze again.”

Dr. Perry unlocked Adam's cage; another growl, louder this time.

“Oh,” said Dr. Perry, raising the barred door, “feeling mean tonight, aren't you, Adam?”

Dr. Perry saw only a blur! That was all he saw, a blur of a face contorted in a fierce snarl as the tiny body catapulted out of the cage, leaping on the surprised doctor.

Dr. Perry was thrown backward by the sudden attack of the monster infant. His glasses were knocked from his face and shattered against the far wall. They ended up in the corner, broken, bent grotesquely out of shape.

Dr. Perry, confused and totally disoriented, groped for his gun. He pulled it out of his jacket and it fell from his trembling fingers; he was lost without his glasses. His face was scratched and bleeding, the blood running freely.

Desperately, with hands out in front of him, he felt around the experiment table, trying to find the telephone intercom so that he could warn the rest of the house.

Suddenly something pulling at his leg made him trip. He fell over the table that held his precious notes.

There, lying defenseless on the floor, he heard the sound of something, something with long claws scratching its way across the cement floor coming toward him.

“Oh, no!” he cried. “No!” He’d heard reports of the Davis baby, that it would murder people. He never really

believed them. He did now!

Frantically he felt around, searching, reaching for his gun. He found it! Blindly, he tried to adjust it in his hand. Just as he did, something, a claw, ripped across his arm and sent the gun skidding across the floor. The doctor's arm was useless, mangled, almost dismembered, the blood seeping down onto his stomach.

He tried to scream, but he couldn't. Above him he heard the other two infants in their cages, shrieking, aroused by this sudden blood lust.

Now the doctor felt the creature crawling up his body, over the mangled arm, going, he knew, for his throat.

“No!” he cried, finding his voice. “Don't!”

It was too late. The creature was at its teacher's throat, doing what it did best, tearing this man's life away.

Finished, it scampered off the dead doctor across the fallen table, over Dr. Perry's priceless documentation. Those wild dreams of communicating with another species were all dashed away now, reduced to mere scraps of paper lying useless on the floor. Just a path for this thing, this creature, to crawl across, leaving behind it a trail of the doctor's blood from its bloody claws.

Now the claw reached across and closed around Dr. Perry's keys, the keys that opened the cages for the other two and the door to the basement. In a moment, if it had the intelligence, all three would be free, free to roam at will.



Outside, police were moving through the night, through the thick firebrush areas, armed and ready, surrounding every possible avenue of escape.

Approaching the estate from the other side, more police moved down the hillside, breaking their way through the dry undergrowth, hacking their way to positions above the house.

Mallory was with them. "Stay close together," he instructed. "If it gets out of the house and into the brush, we won't stand a chance. It's got to be killed inside that house." He pointed down to the house visible below them, a few lights on in the upper rooms.



One of those lights was in the room occupied by Frank Davis. He, along with others in the house, couldn't sleep. He had gotten up, dressed, and was on his way downstairs, searching for something to read.

Down the long winding Spanish staircase he came, his shadow immense on the wall. He crossed to the front door, opened it, and looked out into the night.

Nothing, not that he had expected anything; just the wind, the chirping of crickets, and occasionally the passing of some sort of plane far above. Nothing else.

Then suddenly, a figure stepped in beside Frank, a hand touched him. Frank jumped.

"Oh, I'm sorry," apologized Dr. Forrest. "I didn't mean to frighten you."

“Oh, no, that's okay. You didn't frighten me,” Frank lied, so as not to embarrass the doctor. “You couldn't sleep either, eh,” he laughed.

“Not a wink.” Dr. Forrest smiled. “What about some gin rummy?”

“Why not?” said Frank. And with Dr. Forrest leading the way, they entered what was once the great hall of the mansion.

Once carefully, exquisitely furnished, the hall now contained only a few pieces of furniture, makeshift stuff at that, scattered around. They sat down at a paint-smearred table. Dr. Forrest broke open a new package of playing cards.

“I brought these just in case,” he said, delighted at last to find someone who played.

“Oh, you did,” said Davis. “Seems to me I'm going up against some kind of a shark here.”

They both laughed, their laughter resounding up and echoing off the bare undraped walls.



Listening to their laughter, and drawn to it from the top of the stairway leading up from the basement, was one of the creatures. It heard that strange sound echoing in the huge room. The creature, curious, crossed the dining room leading to the great hall.

Reaching the large archway leading into the room, it stopped. Squinting, its eyesight not yet fully developed, it watched the two men hunched over the table, slapping

small cardboard objects down onto that wooden table. The creature watched, enthralled, trying, perhaps, to figure out why this ritual, or whatever it was, amused those two men so much.

At the stairway another of the creatures crawled upward, up the stairs to the second floor.

In Eugene and Jody's room, Jody had fallen, from complete exhaustion, into a mindless, dreamless sleep.

Eugene, on the other hand, lay there wide awake, staring at the ceiling. He heard something crawling! He got up on one elbow. He looked toward the window. No, he decided, it's nothing. It's just those winds brushing something up against the house, making a sound like that, like something crawling.



And in another part of the house, coming up the back stairs to the second floor, was the third creature. It came to a door, slightly ajar. Inside, it heard the rushing of water. Then the water stopped.

The creature moved closer and peered in.

Steven King, the karate expert, couldn't sleep, either. After thrashing around in his bed for twenty minutes with no luck, he thought a shower might help. Now he had climbed out of the shower, drying himself vigorously with a towel. He looked over at his door, more than halfway open.

Did I leave it that far open? he wondered. Steven had left the door open intentionally. Earlier today he'd told Barbara, "any time you want it, it's there waiting for you

down in that little room. That's the way I am," he said. "I lay it right out on the line."

"Yes, well, I'm the same way," Barbara had said, "and I'm telling you, you're going to be a lot older, and a lot grayer, with four prostate operations under your belt, before I come down to your little room."

Typical bitch of a nurse, thought Steven, continuing to dry himself. If I were a doctor, she'd be there quick enough.

Dry now, he struck a karate pose in the mirror, then slapped his flat stomach. "Not bad, not bad," he said aloud. "Dumb bitch don't know what she's missing."

He started across the room to his bed, a large double bed with the bedclothes piled in all directions from his earlier efforts to get to sleep.

One pile, however, looked strangely suspicious, more like a lump, as if something were under the bedclothes, under the blankets.

Steven saw none of this. He crossed to the far wall and switched out the light. He turned for one last look down the hall. No Barbara. "Oh, well." He got into bed. Kicking the covers away, he pulled the sheet over himself and lay back in the darkness.

Moments of silence and waiting. Then suddenly he jumped up, only to reach over and begin setting the alarm clock by his bed. He wound it... and wound it, and then lay back again on the bed.

Another moment; the covers next to him began to rise! Steven's eyes flickered to the right. He saw it, this rising form beside him in the bed. Now the sheet fell away! He saw it... the creature! Instinctively his arm came up toward the infant in a lethal karate blow! The infant took it on the side of the head, fell down, and then was up

growling, crawling up at its foe. Steven tried to scream, but the infant was there at his throat, tearing it open.

Steven King's powerful arms flailed out in all directions, trying to get loose, hitting the alarm clock, knocking it onto the bed. The alarm went off. The infant grabbed it and intelligently muffled it under the covers. Now it looked at Steven, the thing that had hit it, who was dead.

It growled, as a crimson stain began to spread out on the sheet.



Below, Frank Davis and Dr. Forrest heard the growl.

“Did you hear something?” asked Frank.

“The door to the basement must be open,” said Dr. Forrest.

“And a phone,” said Frank. “Sounded as if a phone were ringing upstairs.”

Dr. Forrest got up. “I'm going to see about Dr. Perry,” he said.



Upstairs in Jody and Eugene's small bedroom, Eugene sat upright in bed. He was soaked with perspiration. Over by the windows, the curtains, thin with age, were blowing; it was those hot winds again.

“Damned Santa Anas!” Eugene muttered.

He got up and looked over at Jody, sleeping soundly. He went to the window. Looking out, he watched the trees swaying easily in the breeze and saw, to the left, the swimming pool illuminated by a single floodlight at one end.

Why not? he said to himself, looking to see if Jody was still asleep.



A few minutes later Eugene, dressed in an old faded swimsuit he'd found the first day he was brought here, let himself quietly out the bedroom door and started quickly down the hall. At the top of the stairs he met Frank Davis coming up.

“Did you hear a phone or a doorbell, something like that?” asked Frank calmly.

“No,” said Eugene. “When?”

“Just before, well, never mind. Hey,” Frank said, “a swim's not a bad idea. I may join you in a few minutes.”

“Why not?” said Eugene as he moved down the stairs and toward the front door.



Downstairs, Dr. Forrest had just reached the steel door of the basement laboratory. It was closed, but not locked.

He opened it cautiously, as if he knew something was wrong. It was dark. The lights were out!

“Dr. Perry?” he called.

No answer.

He moved further into the room, feeling for a wall switch. Then he remembered. No such amenities as wall switches. The wiring had been put in this room most rapidly, and only a month or so ago. The only switch was an overchanging connection in the middle of the room.

Calling “Dr. Perry?” again, he moved step by cautious step into the pitch-black room as he felt overhead for the switch.

Then his foot touched something. Soft. Too soft to be a table or a chair.

“Dr. Perry,” he said again, a touch of panic in his voice. His arms still sawed at the air in search of that elusive light switch. “Dr. Perry?”

He felt the cordlike wire and quickly, frantically followed it to its connection and switched on the amber light.

The first thing he saw was the empty cages, three of them, the doors swinging open, the creatures gone.

As if not anxious to see what lay at his feet, he looked down slowly. He saw it; he nodded, expecting to see it all along. It was Dr. Perry, his body horribly twisted, horribly dead. He looked around the room; there was no sign of the infants.

Calmly he stepped over his friend's body to the house intercom, which had been installed for just such an emergency.

“Perry's dead,” he said into the device. “They've gotten out. All three of them have gotten out.”



Eugene had crossed the vast lawn leading to the pool. He stood looking down into the water, the light bouncing off it, making up his mind whether he should go in or not. Apart from the leaves that covered almost the entire length and breadth of the pool, the water itself seemed dark and still, as if the pool hadn't been used for a long, long time.

Undecided, he reached down. He touched the water; it was cool, refreshing.

He stood and, feet first and with a splash, jumped in. Almost immediately he surfaced, holding his breath, making sure he didn't swallow any of the water. He started slowly paddling around, picking out as he did floating leaves by the light of the solitary floodlight toward the end of the pool. Then he heard something. He looked up. Nothing, just the incessant chirping of crickets. He saw a weathered sign off to the side, just barely connected to a rusty, bent old pole. "SWIM AT YOUR OWN RISK," the sign said.

"That's for sure," Eugene murmured, smiling, picking out more leaves.

Then another sound, more than crickets this time; as if something were moving in the underbrush. It was the goddamn Santa Ana wind blowing the bushes — or was it? What else could it be? thought Eugene.

Suddenly the sound of a bulb shattering! Eugene looked quickly in that direction; the floodlight had gone out! Eugene was plunged into darkness all around him.

“Hey,” he said aloud, “what is this?... Is this a gag, or what?”

Nothing...

He tried again. “Hey, put that light back on, will you?... Davis?” he called. “Is that you?”

There was no answer. Eugene looked around. By the lights from the house he could barely make out a ladder on the far side of the pool. He started in that direction, then, all at once, he stopped. He’d heard something, something else, something much closer! The sound of something, someone, sliding across the concrete, pulling itself along, crawling — the exaggerated sound of something small and in motion, determined to get to where it was going!

Eugene, treading water, was in the center of the swimming pool, virtually helpless. “What's going on?” he said, panic sneaking into his voice. “If there's somebody there, say something...”

Nothing... no human response... just the sound of the Santa Ana winds blowing; the dull thud of the eucalyptus leaves as they fell into the pool; the slapping of the pool water against the concrete edge; and once in a while that crawling sound, and the crinkle of broken glass from the floodlight bulb as something crawled over the pieces.

“All right,” said Eugene, almost choking now, “who's out there, who is it?”

And then a splash! Something had dropped into the pool behind Eugene Scott.

The sound of a living thing swimming in the pool! Coming toward him!

Eugene turned completely around, still treading water, facing the oncoming sound, the foul water sloshing back and forth around him. He didn't speak, he was beyond that

now. A moan, that was all, a moan of fear was the only sound he could make. He heard it, whatever it was, something swimming in the pool, coming at him. Eugene's only hope now was that someone in the house, someone very ruthlessly cruel or insensitive, was playing this vicious joke on him.

“Davis!” he finally managed to scream. “Davis, is that you?”



At the huge gate guarding the grounds, two policemen were working on the mechanism of the electric-eye control that operated the gate. Finally and noiselessly, the gate slid open and Detective Perkins, followed by several policemen, moved quickly onto the grounds. Behind them two police cars moved, just as noiselessly, up the driveway.

At another point far above the house, Mallory and a team of men were climbing over fences, advancing on the grounds.



Eugene, meanwhile, was frozen in the center of the swimming pool, afraid to look to the right or to the left for any means of escape. He could only stare straight ahead at whatever it was that was coming at him.

It was closer now, much closer. All hope of a joke gone, he could see it was much too small to be Davis. He could

hear the panting, the guttural breathing of something extremely deadly — he was sure of it — drawing closer, ever closer, coming at him.

Suddenly a voice!... In the distance, but nevertheless a human voice!

“Eugene,” it said. It was Dr. Forrest's voice!

Eugene tried to answer. He opened his mouth; all he got was a mouthful of that foul, putrid water. Again he tried to call out; all he managed was a gasp as a splash of the water slid disgustingly down his throat.

“Eugene!” the voice repeated, closer now. Dr. Forrest was moving across the lawn, for some reason drawn toward the pool, as if he knew Eugene was down there. Maybe Davis had told him.

“Eugene, are you out there? Why aren't the lights on? Don't you hear me?” Dr. Forrest called. “Answer me, for God's sake!”

The creature, or whatever it was, had stopped. It, too, listened to Dr. Forrest's voice.



Detective Perkins and his men, heading up the driveway, froze as they, too, heard Dr. Forrest's voice.

“Eugene?” he called again.



Upstairs, Jody was awakened by the voice below. She turned and, half awake, heard someone calling, the voice full of tension and alarm.

“I'm coming, Eugene,” it said. “I'm coming down to the pool.”

Jody jumped out of bed. She saw that Eugene's bed was empty. Grabbing the old bathrobe, she rushed out of the room into the hall. Turning left rather than right — which would have taken her downstairs and out the front door, down to the pool — she ran down the hall, deeper into the building.

Almost immediately she was lost in a maze of hallways and closed doors. Then, at the end of the corridor, there was another room, its door wide open. She rushed down the hall and through the open door.

Then she screamed! Nothing she had ever seen or done in her life had prepared her for this. Lying across the bed was the nude body of Steven King, his throat ripped out, the sheets covered with red, red blood.

Below, Perkins, still frozen in response to the cries of Dr. Forrest, heard the scream. Immediately he knew that a creature similar to the one he had had a hand in destroying two years before was again at its evil work. Immediately he fired a bright red flare into the dark sky, summoning his men to this spot.



In the pool, Eugene looked up as the flare illuminated the sky; then he turned. He saw it! It was there! This

monster, closer even than he had suspected, its teeth bared, its claws ready to strike!

"No!" Eugene managed to scream, trying futilely to get away from it.

Too late! As the flare waned and the sky went black, the creature was on him. More screams erupted from Eugene and mingled with the growls of the creature as both vanished and splashed beneath the surface of the water.

Dr. Forrest, close to the pool, had seen the attack. The infant was illuminated by a second red flare as it flew at the terrified Eugene Scott. Behind him the doctor saw the police, guns drawn, rushing toward the pool; and clearly he realized their intent was to shoot the infant and never mind who was in there with it.

"Wait," he yelled, "there's someone in there!"

More flares went off as more police swarmed around the pool and stared down into the water trying to get a glimpse of the monster for a good shot at it.

"There it is," said one policeman, and a shot rang out.

Desperately, Dr. Forrest looked around, trying to find someone in command. He saw a plainclothesman, Detective Perkins, gun drawn, as he moved out toward the edge of the pool.

"Please, sir," he cried, approaching him urgently, "there's a man in there."

"We know it," the detective answered, his eyes trained on the water, waiting for the creature to show itself.

Suddenly both of them appeared briefly in a life-or-death struggle, and then quickly they disappeared again below the surface of the water.

"There it is!" yelled Perkins.

More flares as the police leaped into the water, some swimming, others with guns held high as they thrashed their way to Eugene's rescue.

"Careful," shouted Perkins, instructing his men. "Not too close."

Underwater, distorted, almost obliterated by the bubbles of life's breath, the swirling, twisting shapes of Eugene Scott and the creature at his throat were barely visible to the policemen. They were only able to catch a brief glimpse of this small thing as Eugene turned, twisted, and struggled to release himself from its grip.

Above, the police waited, their guns aimed, hoping to get a clear shot at the infant.

"Easy, now," said Perkins. "It's got to come up for air. Just watch out for the man."

Suddenly a few trickles of blood appeared on the surface of the water.

"Oh, no," moaned Dr. Forrest.

Then, just as suddenly, it was there! The infant broke the surface, gasping for air, its teeth bared in a growl, the police too startled, for the moment, to shoot.

"There it is," roared Perkins, he, too, astonished by the spectacle but finally finding his voice. "Get it!"

Only a few shots rang out, but at this point-blank range they were more than enough.

Without a sound the creature sank back into the water and then floated almost completely submerged, along with the leaves, just below the surface of the water.

Over toward the side of the pool, policemen emerged carrying something: Eugene Scott! Helping hands reached down and lifted him out of the water onto the side of the pool.

From where Dr. Forrest was standing he could see Eugene's back and then his chest as they rolled him over; both the back and chest were bloody from the creature's claws.

"How is he?" a voice called out.

"He's all right," answered a policeman, watching another giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to Eugene. "Just swallowed a lot of water."

"Jesus," said another policeman, "look at what that little bastard did to his back!"

Dr. Forrest, on hearing that Eugene Scott was alive, came out of the trancelike state he had been in since he saw the infant killed. Quickly he moved around the pool toward where the policemen were ministrating to Eugene.

"Excuse me," he said, trying to maneuver his way through the body of policemen.

The policemen looked at him questioningly wondering who he was.

"I'm a doctor," he said, responding to the question before it was actually asked.

A policeman's hand reached out, holding him. "Hey, Lieutenant," the policeman called.

Perkins appeared, coming around the side of the pool.

"This guy says he's a doctor," the policeman said as Perkins came closer.

"Yes?" said Perkins, next to Dr. Forrest now, looking at him appraisingly with his candid policeman's eyes.

"I'm a doctor," he repeated. "I want to see about this man." Dr. Forrest pointed to Eugene. "I want to see how badly he's hurt."

"You connected with this lunacy?" Perkins asked, gesturing toward the mansion behind them.

"Uh, yes... I am," said Dr. Forrest, caught completely off guard by the bluntness of the question.

Perkins nodded, then said to the policeman, "Take him down to the car, Sacco."

"Now just a minute," protested Dr. Forrest. "You have no right to arrest..."

Perkins interrupted. "You see, Doctor," he said, pointing to the trio of white-clad figures running toward the pool from an ambulance that had just pulled up, "we have our own doctors."

"Yes, but..."

"Take him away, Sacco," Perkins repeated, moving away to more important matters.

At the end of the pool, over by where the floodlight had been broken, Perkins looked down at the bullet-ridden body of the monster. Then he turned to one of his assistants.

"It's dead," he said. "We finished what we came for. Sound the all-clear."

"Yes, sir," said the policeman, anxious to oblige, just itching to use the official-looking police bullhorn he had clasped in his hand.

"All clear," he shouted into his contraption. "We killed it! Relax."

Another uniformed policeman, this one down by the police car, blew a whistle once, twice, three times, as if this were the signal agreed on before the raid.



In various places all around the grounds of the old estate, policemen, on hearing the whistle three times, began holstering their guns, relaxing, laughing with each other. They knew how dangerous these creatures could be and that one of their number had been killed by the Davis baby the last time a raid like this took place in Los Angeles.



On a steep hillside behind the estate Mallory and two policemen saw the flares and heard the whistles.

“One, two, three,” counted the young policeman. “That's it, three whistles. They got it,” he said, elated.

The other policeman, older, an old buddy of Perkins assigned to Mallory and told by Perkins to keep “the pain in the ass the hell out of the way,” looked at Mallory and saw the frown on his face.

He couldn't resist it. “Disappointed, Mr. Mallory?” He smiled.

Mallory turned to him with his standard cold stare. “About what?” he said.

Fighting off Mallory's malevolent stare, the policeman, named Haskins, prattled on. “Not being there,” he said, “when they got it.”

“Don't you worry about that, sonny,” answered Mallory. “There'll be others. You can bet on that. Plenty of others.”

With that, he started down the hill toward the continuing light of the flares.

“Let's find the Scott woman,” he said, “and Davis.”

“What for?” asked Haskins, winking at the other officer. “You can't charge them with anything. They might even say we're violating their constitutional rights,” he said, directing his laugh to his fellow officer.

Mallory, ahead of them, was busy grabbing bushes, working his way down the steep incline, thinking to himself. Let them laugh, the stupid bastards. Ignorance is bliss, as my mother used to say. They don't know what they're up against. This whole thing — the house, the medical unit — hasn't been set up for a baby born a few days ago in Tucson. This is an entire organization that has to be crushed!



And in the house, upstairs in the room that held Steven King's dead and mutilated body, Jody still stood in her original position as if frozen with fear, staring down at the bloodied sheet. Flares from the window lit her face. Who was this man? She wondered dazedly. She'd seen him before, but briefly.

“We're wrong in doing this. It shouldn't be allowed to live.” She heard his words, seeping out of her subconscious mind. Now she remembered! This man,

hadn't he been one of the nurses in the delivery room? Hadn't he said those words?

Jody moved closer to make sure. More flares, rekindling the light from outside. Jody looked again at his face.

“Oh, my God,” she said aloud. “It's him.”

She wanted to turn away but she couldn't. What did this have to do with her? Was she responsible for this? Did this have anything to do with her baby?

“Oh, no,” she muttered, “oh, no.”

Jody leaned closer, following the tracks of the dead man's blood down his face, down to his throat.

Oh, my God, the throat! The throat was like... how could she describe it? As if it had been ripped out.

She heard something — something above the police whistles blowing outside, something in the room!

She straightened up. She heard it again, the sound of a growl. It was behind her, she thought. She turned; as she did, another growl, this one high, piercing, threatening.

She looked around her. The room was spasmodically illuminated by red flares from outside; all she saw were drapes billowing in the Santa Ana wind.

“It's a dog,” she said hopefully. “That's what it is. A dog, growling and barking at the intruders.”

Whatever it was, she must get out of this room. She took one tentative step backward. If she could only reach the door, get through it, close it, she would be safe.

She started again, edging backward, one step at a time, getting closer and closer to the door. That's it, she thought, almost smiling. It was outside, a dog outside, that's what it was. One more step... Suddenly again, lower than before but much more ferocious, came the growl. She

stopped, frozen, and then she saw it! For the first time she saw it; only the outline, though, crouched on the floor, ready to spring, outlined by the red flares, the monster!

She tried to move. She couldn't. She must do something. She tried speaking, forcing her voice out of her tight, almost closed throat.

“What,” she whispered, “what do you want?”

Another growl, even more menacing.

“I didn't do anything,” she said, as if trying to reason with this thing. “I have nothing to do with them, those people outside. I'm not like them. I don't want to harm you.”

Another growl, this one even more terrifying, as if it were about to attack.

Jody knew now that it was going to kill her, just as it had that poor man in the bed. She saw the door, the hallway, one step away. She must try it or else she'd be dead. She must make it out that door!

She bolted forward, faster than she'd ever moved before, quickly through the door! She grabbed the handle of the door, slamming it shut just as the creature threw itself against it. She heard it slamming its small body at the door, clawing at it viciously, trying to get out.

She fell to the floor, still holding on to the door, holding it closed. On the other side she heard the scratching and scraping of the long claws ripping at the door. And the growl.

“What is this?” she said. “What is this thing?”

Could this be her baby? This thing that wanted so badly to kill her... that she was so deathly afraid of?

Then it stopped. The clawing, the slamming stopped.

"Thank God," murmured Jody, lying against the door, keeping it closed.

But why does it want to kill me? she wondered. Frank Davis said it sought out its parents, its mother especially. Why would it be after me? But wait a minute! Maybe this one isn't mine. Maybe this is one of the other ones.

That's what it is, this is one of the other ones. This one doesn't even know who I am.

But never mind, she smiled, we'll straighten all this out later. I'll just rest here a while. After all, it's on the inside and I'm on the outside. Someone will be along in a minute to help me.

Suddenly a noise. Jody looked up. The doorknob was turning! The thing had obviously gotten up on its hind legs and had reached up and turned the doorknob. Now the scratching and scraping became even more furious as the door was pulled open a few inches. Jody was on her knees now, using all her strength to keep it shut. But she was losing! No matter how hard she pulled, the door, inch by inexorable inch, was opening more and more!

Jody panicked. She knew she couldn't hold on much longer. Even now she could see the edge of that hideous, brutish body straining to open the door. Frantically she looked down the hall, praying for somebody to come, somebody to help her.

She saw a light coming from her room, the room she occupied with Eugene. A door that had a lock on it. That's it, she thought. She must try it!

She got to her feet, still holding on to the doorknob, still keeping the door closed so that the thing inside couldn't get at her.

She had to run down that corridor, get to her own room, get inside, and lock the door before that thing got to

her. It was only about forty-five feet away. She was barefoot but she could run that in just a few seconds. But could the creature get outside the room and catch up to her in that time?

What was the difference? The door was opening more and more. She could see more and more of that thing, pulling with its superhuman strength.

She had to take the chance!

Ready. She was on her feet now, still bracing the door. Finally she let go! The door sprang open. Jody was running, screaming, racing for the light from her open door. The forty-five feet seemed more like a mile. She heard the scraping, running sound at her heels.

“Help!” she screamed. “Help!”

She reached the door of her room, grabbing the doorjamb to stop herself as she heard the infant skidding by. Then, as she saw the infant recovering, coming back at her, she grabbed the door and slammed it shut, hitting the infant, knocking it out into the hallway again.

She'd made it, she was inside, safe. She heard the creature, incensed, slamming against the door, almost forcing it open. She turned the bolt. Again the infant rammmed the door. There was a chain lock. She applied that, too. The thing outside leaped against the door, pounding, growling. But I'm safe, she thought, catching her breath; I'm inside this fully lit room and that's that; I made it; this thing can pound and pound all it wants and it's just not going to get me; I'll just stay here, waiting for help, for Eugene; oh, where is Eugene?

She turned. She looked back at her bed as if deciding what she would do with herself until they came, all of them, to help her.

Then she saw the mess! Her clothing, the clothing she had worn when she went to the movies with her mother, when she escaped to this place. There it was, ripped apart as if by some madman.

The dress chosen so carefully to survive the journey; to last possibly a few days, torn in two. The large leather handbag, the one Eugene had bought her at that Indian place in Santa Fe, torn open as if by claws.

All of her belongings, her compact, her address book, everything was ripped apart. And there in the center of it all was that lipstick. That strange, unidentifiable lipstick, torn open now as if bitten through by a set of incredibly powerful teeth, the wires and transistors hanging out for all to see!

Jody moved closer. Staring at it, trying to figure out what it was, what it had to do with her.

About to pick it up, but carefully, as if it might have some electrical charge to it, she heard something.

Not the pounding on the door — she had grown immune to that in the few minutes she had been in the room. This was a new sound, a different kind of growl, as if it were newer than the one outside! She turned as if she expected it. She was almost certain what she would find.

She saw it, there on the other bed, growling up at her. Jody recognized it. She saw the resemblance, she knew who this baby was...



Outside, police piled into squad cars, joking, laughing with each other, pulling away.

Dr. Forrest, handcuffed now, sat in the back of one of the police cars. The driver of the car was about to get in and take the doctor away. Before he did, he stopped to listen to policeman shouting at him from another police car.

“You mean you didn't even get a shot at it?” the policeman snorted.

“Man,” said the driver of the police car Dr. Forrest was in, “all those hotshots from Central got in there to grab all the glory.”

“Well, better luck next time,” said the other policeman, laughing, driving away.

“For sure!” The policeman got into the police car and his huge shotgun on the specially built rack in the front seat.

Dr. Forrest coughed, clearing his throat. “Uh... listen, Officer, maybe I better tell you something...”

That was as far as he got. The policeman turned and said to Dr. Forrest brashly, “Listen, Doc, save it, will ya? Talking to me is like talking to that ashtray back there, for all the good it'll do ya. You'll get your chance when you get downtown.”

The last word or two of his remark was lost as the wail of an ambulance pulling up the road and onto the premises filled the night air.

All right, thought Dr. Forrest, watching the policeman almost lovingly readjust the shotgun on its rack, they'll know soon enough, with their big guns; they'll have a great old time when they find out; target practice, that's all it is to them.



Jody stood in her room, staring at the infant. The infant was tense, ready, as if deciding whether it should strike.

Jody spoke. "You are mine, aren't you? I can see it."

Nothing from the baby, only a low growl. The pounding on the door had not stopped; in fact, it had become louder. From outside, and adding to the confusion, the fright of it all, the wail of an ambulance filled the air.

Jody persisted, staring at the infant, taking a step or two closer. The infant growled louder, signaling Jody to stay back.

"Can't you tell who I am?" she asked.

Another growl.

"Why do you hate me?" she pleaded, reaching out a hand to touch it, evoking a bigger, more frightening growl.

Suddenly a crash! The door behind Jody burst off its hinges, flying, open, shattering the lock, ripping the chain off the wall. Jody whirled and screamed as Frank Davis rushed into the room and grabbed her, just as she was about to collapse to the floor.

"Easy, easy," Frank said. "They won't hurt you. They'll do what I say."

"Why do they hate me?" Jody cried, holding on to Frank for dear life.

Frank saw it! He moved Jody cautiously over to the bed. He picked up the lipstick with its wires and

transistors hanging out. As he did, a few more growls issued from the infants.

"You led them here," he explained.

"Oh, my God," said Jody, realizing now what that innocent-looking lipstick really was.

"It wasn't your fault," continued Frank, "but they don't understand that. Somehow they know what it is and what it does. That's all they know."

Jody took the tiny transmitter in her hand. "But how did it get there?"

She stopped. Of course! Who else but her mother! Her mother had put it there. She looked up at Frank, who had already guessed who had done it. "Yes," she said, "mothers can be a very dangerous species," and then, in complete frustration, she threw the tiny transmitter viciously against the far wall.

"How could she do it?" she cried. "How could she do a thing like that?"

"Take it easy," said Frank, trying to calm her. "She only did what she thought was right. She just didn't understand, that's all."

A noise! They looked up. The infant, Jody's infant, no longer growling, was crawling toward Jody and Frank as if it understood what had happened, as if it now wanted to come to its mother, wanted its mother to hold it.

"Oh, my God, look, Frank," Jody said.

Frank nodded. "I know," he said, "I know."

Jody went to it. She picked it up. And then, awkwardly at first, getting used to the shape of it, she held it in her arms...



Outside by the pool, Eugene Scott was being put on a stretcher. The body of the infant had been scooped from the pool into a net and placed by the side of the pool, as if for examination.

Detective Lieutenant Perkins was standing up on the huge lawn, halfway between the pool and the house. Perkins was of the same mind as Mallory. This house, these doctors, all of this could never have been organized in a few days. There was more to it than that.

He walked back across the lawn, toward the pool. Two police officers stood guarding the tiny corpse, waiting for whatever designated experts who would eventually come to claim it.

They watched Perkins as he knelt and peered intently at the baby. Suddenly the arm moved; even in death it terrified people with one last involuntary spasm.

Perkins jumped back.

The cops laughed. "Scared hell out of you, didn't it, Lieutenant?" one of them said.

"I'm scared all right," answered Perkins. "Scott's baby was a boy, wasn't it?"

"Sure," said the cop, still smiling.

"Yeah," said Perkins, looking down again at the baby to be sure. "Well, this one's a female."



Mallory smiled his thin smile. He thought he'd found what he was looking for.

He stood at the top of a long metal staircase. At the bottom was a massive, newly installed steel door.

"That's it," he said, "that's where they kept it," he mumbled to himself.

He started down the stairs. Police were with him. Guns holstered, they came down the stairs laughing and smiling, amused at Mallory's stern composure.

At the bottom of the stairs, Haskins, smiling back at Mallory, asked, "Whatcha looking for, sir?"

"Just open the door," said Mallory gruffly.

"Sure thing," said Haskins, still smiling. "At your service."

When the door was opened, the police all stopped cold. They saw, as did Mallory, the disarray within. Everything scattered, the outline of a white coat lying amidst the chaos. It smelled of one thing — familiar to any experienced policeman — death.

Mallory, gun drawn, stepped into the room first. Seeing Perry's corpse, he stepped over it, eyes constantly wary, and moved ahead, waiting for something to spring. He turned to one side, then saw what he had expected to see. Not just one open cage but two, and then the third. All with food, water, different types of games, numbered blocks.

Turning, Mallory ran back to the door of the laboratory, calling to one of the policemen as he went, "Give me that," he said, pointing to the policeman's radio transmitter.

The policeman, only too happy to oblige, tossed it to Mallory.

Mallory caught it and spoke tensely into the speaker. "Attention, attention," he said. "To all police personnel. This is Mallory. There are three. Do you understand? At least three of these creatures are presently loose on these premises. All police are to have their weapons out and ready to shoot to kill! Over and out." He handed back the transmitter, repeating the words for himself, "Over and out."

He smiled a gloating smile as he watched the cops, especially Haskins, draw their guns and look anxiously into every dark corner of that gloomy basement.



Upstairs, Jody was holding the baby, her baby, talking to it soothingly. Frank was at the window, but back far enough so that no one could see him as he watched the confusion below.

Mallory had just come out the front door of the house, yelling, repeating the information he had just relayed into the police radio. "There's two more," he said. "There were two more at the house. Be careful; maybe they're out here by now."

Frank turned back into the room. Starting toward Jody, he stopped, just for an instant really, to watch Jody, the

mother, lovingly holding her baby.

A harsh voice from below the window brought him back to reality. "Shoot first," it said, "ask questions later."

Jody heard it, too. She turned to Frank, an anxious, questioning look on her lovely face. "What'll we do?" she asked.

"We've got to get out of here. Come on," he said, leading her toward the door.

"Where's the other one?" Jody asked, suddenly remembering that the other infant was about somewhere.

Frank looked around. "Who knows? It's too late now to do anything about it. Come on! We've got to at least save yours."



At poolside, Eugene thrashed about in apparent shock, strapped to a stretcher by two ambulance attendants with the additional help of two policemen.

Incoherent, Eugene was mumbling something.

"What's he saying?" asked one of the policemen.

"Sounds like, 'We were wrong, Jody, we were wrong,'" answered one of the hospital attendants, used to this sort of behavior and able to interpret inarticulate ranting better than others.



Upstairs, Jody, carrying her baby, was being led down the back hallway by Frank Davis.

Halfway down the hall, and passing an open door, she slowed down, shuddering as she thought of that man, the dead man she had seen in that room.

Up ahead, Frank saw her pause. "Come on," he said, urging her on. Jody, getting a hold of herself, moved forward.

Reaching the end of the corridor, they made a left, then another left and then a right, coming upon a short staircase that led to a back door.

Opening the back door, Frank stepped out onto a terrace behind the Spanish mansion. He turned to Jody as she came through the door, still holding the baby.

"Let me have the baby," he said.

"What?" She could not give it up.

"Jody!" Frank said. "They'll be here any minute. You stay here, keep them busy. It's all been planned. I know a way out, up into those hills," he lied.

Reluctantly, seeing that Davis was right, she handed over the baby. "Will I see him again?" she said.

"If it's safe," he said, taking the baby. "We've got to be sure it's absolutely safe."

Frank started across the narrow terrace carrying the baby. He climbed easily over a short fence and began to clamber up the hillside behind the house, into the thick firebrush surrounding it.

Jody watched as Davis climbed higher and higher up a steep embankment, some of the dirt shifting around, falling back down onto the terrace. Suddenly he slipped!

"Oh, no!" gasped Jody, holding her breath.

Frank grabbed at dried branches and clusters of brush to save himself. Secure now, he started again up the steep incline. Finally he reached the top and then disappeared into the darkness.

Jody sighed, relieved at least, that her baby was safe for the moment. Suddenly she heard a noise, someone yelling. She turned to one side. She saw a staircase and heard yells from individuals who were, right now, scrambling up those stairs.

She ran to the staircase. Suddenly the beam of a flashlight hit her full in the face, blinding her.

"Please," she said.

"Who are you?" said a voice. It was Perkins with several other policemen.

"I'm Mrs. Scott," she said, and then, "Where's my husband?"

"At UCLA Emergency Hospital. He's all right. Where are the other two?" Perkins asked.

"You know about them?" asked Jody, obeying Frank's instructions to stall them.

"Please, ma'am," said Perkins, "don't waste time."

"Haven't you forced me to do enough already?" Jody retorted angrily. "You turned them against me."

"I'm sorry," said Perkins, shaking his head. He knew he was not about to get any help from this woman. What's the matter with these people? he thought. Her husband mauled, almost killed, and still they lie, they'll do anything to save these things. Am I crazy or are they crazy? It's got to be one or the other.

"All right," he said to his men, "take her downstairs."

“Yes, sir,” said two of his men, who guided the young woman down the stairs.

“Please,” Jody cried, unable to stop herself, “don't hurt him.”

Perkins watched her go, then turned and saw the steep hillside leading up and into the woods. With his flashlight he followed an imaginary path from the woods back again down to the terrace. At the terrace's edge, he saw something else: sprinkles of fresh dirt, fresh from the side of the hill.

Suddenly a voice, almost hysterical, deep within the house cried, “There it is, there it is!” A shot rang out.

Perkins, his men following, moved quickly for the door. Inside, another shot rang out. More yells and the sound of men running echoed through the old house as if these men were chasing one of those creatures down the maze of corridors, firing at it as at some cornered game.

Perkins and his men moved from one deserted room to another, searching, the sounds of the hunt getting closer and closer. Then, coming out of one deserted room and into another corridor, Perkins saw it! It scurried down a hall, Mallory and two policemen after it, shooting wildly in its direction. Then it went into a room with Mallory and the two policemen close behind it. Then shots, a barrage of them, rang out deafeningly.

Perkins, running, reached the room. He looked in. He saw two policemen, then Mallory, all holding smoking guns still aimed at the body of the dead baby as if they meant to fire again.

“Hold it,” said Perkins.

Mallory turned, smiling. He was really enjoying himself, Perkins thought.

“Well, that's two,” said Mallory.

“Boy, you should have seen it,” said Haskins. “I coulda sworn it was trying to say something just before we shot it.”

“Shut up!” said Mallory. “Somebody cover it,” he shouted.

One of the officers pulled a drape down from the wall — a dusty old drape — and tossed it over the lifeless form.

“Let's find the other one,” said Mallory. “Anyone seen Davis?”

No answer. Everyone was strangely quiet all of a sudden, watching the officer adjusting that old, filthy drape over that tiny figure.

Mallory asked the question again, this time directed to Lieutenant Perkins. “You seen Davis, Lieutenant?”

Perkins shook his head.

“We find Davis, we'll find the third,” Mallory said. “You got any ideas where he is?”

Perkins didn't answer him, but he remembered something. He remembered that fresh dirt on the edge of the terrace leading up into the woods.

TEN

It was still dark. Even if it hadn't been, no one could easily have seen Frank Davis. He was running through very thick woods in the Santa Monica Mountains. With every step, he gasped tortuously for breath. He couldn't stop now, though; he knew he had to take advantage of his lead. It wouldn't be long before it was dawn, before the Los Angeles police had their helicopters out here, surveying these mountains. Suddenly he heard something, or thought he heard something. Yes, he had. A sound up ahead. Then a set of headlights swept across the deep woods and was gone.

"A road," whispered Frank Davis. "Of course, that's it." It would be easy to stop a car with a baby.

He fought his way out of the thicket of trees and stood on the macadam road listening in one direction, then the other, for the sound of an approaching car.

A moment later he heard it, the sound of a car engine farther up the hill. As the sound grew louder and louder, Davis stood in the middle of the narrow two-lane road, adjusting the blanket, making sure the infant was completely hidden from view.

Then the headlights appeared around the curve, bearing down on Frank Davis and his bundle.

Davis, boldly holding his ground, held the blanket-covered infant in plain view in front of him. "Stop," he shouted, "stop!"

A screeching of brakes and the car, a compact, stopped a few yards from Frank and the baby.

Frank ran around to the passenger-side window, already opened by the man, fiftyish — a nice man, but a little scared — who had leaned across the front seat to roll the window down.

“Jesus, I almost didn't see you,” he said. “What's the trouble?”

“Car broke down back there,” said Frank. “My baby's sick.” He indicated the blanket. “Gotta get to the hospital.”

Frank had said the magic word. “A baby,” the man said. “Hop in.” He was sure now he had done the right thing in stopping for this stranger in the middle of the night.

The man smiled. Frank got in. He sat as far away as he could — not that far in a compact car — the blanket still completely covering the infant.

The man started the car. “Maybe we should go back and see if we can get your car started,” he suggested. “I'm pretty good at that sort of thing. Where is it?”

“No, no,” protested Frank. “I'll get it tomorrow. I'll have a friend of mine help me tomorrow.”

“Okay,” said the man, “have it your own way. What's the matter with the baby?”

“I don't know,” answered Frank, too tired to think up a lie.

But the man continued talking — he was a real talker, this man — without hearing what Frank had said.

“Oh, it'll be all right,” he said jovially. “My kids were the same way. Mother and I had them to the emergency room all the time. You know, cuts, bruises, broken bones, burns. They threatened to name a wing of the hospital after us.” The man laughed, appreciating his own joke.

Frank peered out into the darkness, trying to get his bearings.

“What hospital you going to?” the man asked, taking a hairpin turn with relative ease, obviously accustomed to the winding road.

“Oh... I don't know.” Then, covering himself, “I'm not familiar with the hospitals around here.” The baby was still quiet under the blanket.

“Oh, just moved in.” The man smiled taking another sharp curve easily. “A lotta new people moving in. Too many if you ask me.” The man smiled again.

“Right,” said Frank, smiling back.

“Well, there's the Sherman Oaks Hospital in Sherman Oaks. There's the Van Nuys Community in Van Nuys. They're both good. Then there's the Kaiser, too. Are you a member of Kaiser?” the man asked.

“No,” said Frank. Doesn't he ever stop talking? Frank wondered.

“No. Well, then there's St. Joe in Burbank, real fine hospital. My youngest, my daughter, was born there. What's yours, a boy or —”

Before Frank could do anything, say anything, the man reached over — a short distance, really, in the small car — and flicked off the blanket to get a look at the baby.

“ — or a girl,” he finished.

Then he saw it!

Enough of it, including a claw, to see how hideous it was.

He screamed! And then he screamed again, almost out of his mind. He lost control of the car! The car careened

from side to side down the narrow canyon road, punctuated by the sounds of the man's screams.

“Help, help! Oh, Jesus, help!” the man screamed.

The baby was scared now, growling. Frank didn't know whether to hold the baby or to try to get the car under control. Clumsily he did a little of both.

For some reason the car slowed, running off the road into the low brush.

Still the man screamed as Frank struggled to control the baby. It was now completely out of its blanket, squirming in Frank's arms, its claws, its fangs, there for the man to see.

The car had almost stopped. Somehow Frank got the door open and, holding the baby, jumped clear of the car.

Frank and the baby, with the blanket somewhere between them, landed, rolling, in some soft leaves. Behind them the man continued to scream as the car pounded slowly into a soft bank. Frank picked himself and the baby up and plunged deep into the thick woods.



Frank ran. He kept on running through those dark woods — he couldn't tell for how long. All he knew was that he must stop. He must rest somewhere.

Suddenly the woods ended.

What's this? Frank wondered, stopping, wary of leaving the cover of the trees.

The baby growled.

“Shush,” Frank said.

He inched forward. He saw a clearing and then the moon, what was left of it, reflecting off a body of water.

"Of course," said Frank. "The reservoir! There's got to be something, a shack, anything. A place where I can rest."

Quickly he made his way across the clearing, coming now to a high wire fence. He moved along the fence, looking down occasionally at the moon-dappled water. He saw the first of several warning signs: RESERVOIR — LOS ANGELES COUNTY WATER SUPPLY — *KEEP OUT*.

Frank stopped. There it was beyond the fence, a road and a small pickup truck waiting for the taking!

"The keys are in it," said Frank. "I know they are," he insisted, convincing himself. He looked at the fence. "I can do it," he said. "Even with the baby I can get over it."

He started to climb, cautiously, one-handedly, the baby in the other hand, hidden by the blanket. With great difficulty he reached the top.

Smiling, congratulating himself, he pulled himself over and started down the other side. Then it happened! His coat got caught in the fence. He pulled; nothing; he was stuck. The baby growled.

"Easy, baby, easy," he said.

He pulled again, frantic. The coat ripped. He was free!

Silently he descended and then, finally down, he started across the cindered ground toward the pickup.

"Who's there?" a voice snapped suddenly from the pickup truck, hoarse from its owner's sitting in the cold night air guarding the city's water supply.

Frank Davis stopped. He held the baby tight. "It's all right," he whispered, "it's all right."

“Who's there?” the voice demanded again, moving closer.

It was an old man, his body bent with age, moving closer and staring through the darkness with rheumy eyes at this intruder.

“Who's there?” he asked a third time, reaching for something.

Davis felt it. The baby was panicked. It was growling continuously now, growing angrier. It suspected a trap. A light came on, hitting it flush in the face.

“It's not the police... it's a watchman,” he pleaded with the baby, and then louder, calling to the watchman, “Please, sir, please put out that light.”

“I said who's there?” yelled the watchman. “You better answer.”

A ferocious growl, and suddenly the baby sprang out of Frank's grasp onto the ground, leaving Frank with no more than the empty blanket. Quickly it advanced on the old man.

“No!” cried Frank. “No!”

The infant was right at the watchman's feet now, ready to attack.

The watchman, adjusting his flashlight, saw it for the first time crouched at his feet.

“Jesus!” he screamed.

“No!” yelled Frank. He ran forward and jumped on the infant, who sprang into the air, going for the old man!

The infant felt itself being grabbed, pulled to the ground by a heavy weight. It turned, terrified, doing the only thing it knew how to do, claw! Clawing away at this thing — Davis — that was restraining it. In no time it had

clawed its way through the blanket. Blood gushed instantly as Frank fell back against the fence, and the infant, in the beam of the old man's flashlight, attacked again and again, clawing its way into Frank Davis's throat.

Then a scream, the old man's scream, the crash of the flashlight falling to the ground. Then the old man running, the pickup truck starting up, moving quickly away. Then silence, except for the sound of the infant scurrying away into the brush.



Eugene Scott was thankful he was alive. He sat on the edge of a hospital bed in the UCLA Emergency Hospital in Los Angeles, watching a nurse, young but skillful, change the bandages on his hands. She had already changed the bandages on his arms and back.

"Finished," she said, the first word she'd said since she came into the room. She knew who Eugene was; everybody did. She knew how he got those wounds. Eugene had watched curious heads appear at his door all morning, then disappear when they saw he was watching them.

"There are some men waiting for you outside," the nurse said, turning toward the door.

"Who?"

"Police, I think." she said as she went out.

"Naturally," said Eugene. "Who else?"

Perkins, followed closely by Mallory as if afraid he'd miss something, appeared at the hospital-room door.

“Mr. Scott,” said Perkins formally, moving closer to the bed.

“Mr. Perkins,” said Eugene just as formally.

“We made some reservations for you and your wife on the five o’clock for Tucson.”

“If I were you I’d keep us around for bait,” said Eugene, smiling.

“So you heard about it,” said Mallory.

“Heard what?” asked Eugene.

“Davis got killed,” said Mallory, almost gleefully.

“No, I didn't,” said Eugene.

“Well, don't feel bad about it,” said Mallory. “If there was ever somebody looking for it, he was the guy.”

“Was it the baby?” asked Eugene.

“ ’Course it was the baby. What else?” snickered Mallory.

Eugene got up. Will this nightmare ever end? he wondered. With some difficulty he moved across the room toward the window. God, I hate that guy, he thought. He stopped, looking out the window, and began to speak. “Davis told us these infants have a homing instinct. They manage to find their way to their parents. Well, my baby just might like to come back and get me.”

“You’d help us?” asked Mallory anxiously.

Eugene turned. “I'm responsible for this. I suppose a few people would be alive today if I hadn't cooperated...”

“Okay,” said Perkins, “I'll cancel the reservations!” As Perkins left, Mallory stood there smiling at Eugene.

“There's no reason to look so smug about it, Mr. Mallory. I'm a funny guy. Show me a couple of murders and

suddenly I get the point," Eugene said facetiously.

"Listen, Mr. Scott, we all went through the same thing."

"Yeah, I'm sure you did," said Eugene, suddenly very angry. He had to tell this bastard, once and for all, what he thought of him.

"Let me tell you something, Mr. Mallory. You might have had me on your side a long time ago if you didn't take such obvious pleasure in killing these creatures, these babies, whatever the hell they are."

Mallory was about to retort, but then he stopped. He turned to face the wall, as if he couldn't bear to look at Eugene when he told him the truth.

"My real name is Preston," he began slowly. "The one that was born in Seattle two years ago... it was mine. It killed my wife in childbirth... tore her apart. I came home, found it in the apartment standing over her. I knew it would kill me. I was a cop then, too. I had my service revolver. That was it. I killed it."

"And then you made a profession out of it," Eugene said. "If you were right, you had to keep proving it over and over again."

Mallory turned. "I was right," he said evenly. "They don't belong on this earth. But they'll keep coming, and as long as there are guys like Davis, they'll survive. They'll destroy us all. They'll take over."

"Listen," said Eugene. "If you believe in God, you've got to believe they've been put here for a reason."

"Yeah, sure, just like plane crashes. Well, I don't believe in God, Mr. Scott. I don't believe in God any more. And you want to know the day I stopped? The day I came home and found that thing standing over my wife's body."



Later that afternoon, in one of those expensive houses lying flush up against the hills, a birthday party was in progress on the patio behind the house.

Balloons and streamers were everywhere, and the mother, health-club thin, was marching triumphantly from the kitchen carrying an enormous, made-to-order, bakery-shop cake, complete with ten burning candles.

“Here we are,” she said. “Here we are, Cindy.”

Cindy, the birthday girl, ten years old, turned shrewdly, appraising the cake, making sure it was as big as or even bigger than her sister Val’s, whose birthday had taken place last month.

It was.

“All right, make a wish,” cried the mother. “Make a wish!”

A pause, and then Cindy, an old hand at this sort of thing, blew out the candles. No problem.

A big cheer from the grown-ups who surrounded the table. The youngsters sat there bored, wondering why adults went crazy when some child blew out birthday candles. What were you supposed to have at ten years old, emphysema or something?

The father appeared, beaming through the open patio door. “I mixed a fresh pitcher of martinis,” he said, addressing the adults. “The little monsters can take care of themselves.”

Another big cheer from the adults as they filed into the house, leaving the children to their cake.

Val, Cindy's older sister, looked distastefully at her piece of cake. "Ugh, this cake is terrible," she moaned.

"Oh, shut up," said Cindy.

Val jumped up from the table. "Let's play hide-and-seek," she said. "You're it, Cindy!"

"I don't wanna be it," Cindy pouted.

"Oh, no," said Val, teasing her, "it's your party and you gotta be it."

"That's right," shouted the other children, agreeing with Val.

"Oh, all right," said Cindy, getting up from the table with the others, the large cake with elaborate decorations forgotten.

Cindy, against a pole, covered her eyes with her forearm and started to count.

"No cheating," called Val, watching Cindy peeking out from under her arm.

Cindy ignored her and continued her methodical drone, "Nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen," as Val led the other children up into the brush-covered hills.

Reaching a small rise a little way up the hill, Val turned again to check on her sister. "No peeking, Cindy," she screamed down at her.

Cindy just kept on counting, "Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four..."

A little boy, not so sure this was a good idea, approached Val. "What if there's rattlesnakes up here?" he asked.

“Oh, don't be chicken, Alex,” said Val, running off into the deeper brush with some of the bigger children.

Alex turned. He saw a small dog that had decided to follow them up the hill. He picked it up, figuring he'd like to have the dog along when he hid in the brush.

“If you bark, I'll kill you,” the boy threatened as he went off carrying the little dog.

Cindy had mysteriously gone from “thirty-six, thirty-seven” to “ninety-eight, ninety-nine, a hundred.” She opened her eyes. “Anyone near my base is it,” she said, spinning around. “Ready or not, here I come.”

Cindy started up the steep hill. The dry earth slid under her feet, getting into her shoes. She reached the same small rise as the other children had before her and stopped, looking farther up into the hills.

“Here I come,” she repeated.

“Here I come,” called back a voice, her sister Val, mimicking her.

Then all the children took it up. “Here I come,” they yelled, shaking the bushes they were hiding behind, giggling down at the birthday girl.

Cindy began climbing again, higher, more dirt getting into her shoes. “Ouch!” she said, taking off her shoe, emptying it, and starting again. She was quickly getting tired of this game.

Suddenly she heard a rustling sound and turned quickly. The bushes moved; somebody was in those bushes.

“Okay,” yelled Cindy, “somebody's behind that bush. You're it.”

There was no response... just the sound of something crawling!

“No fair!” cried Cindy impatiently. “Is that you, Val? Come on out...”

No answer.

Cindy stepped forward to break a long branch off a dead tree, then she approached the bushes ready to strike with it.

“Okay for you, Val,” she said. “It's my birthday and you're ruining it. Come on out!”

She shoved the long branch into the bushes and, really angry now, she screamed, “And I don't want your present, either! You didn't even buy it with your own money.”

As Cindy poked the stick into the bushes, the rustling noise seemed to be getting louder — until suddenly it became a roar!

Val and the rest of the youngsters farther up the hill looked skyward. A police helicopter was coming over the hill.

Below, the pilot saw the children hiding in the brush. He grabbed his loudspeaker and shouted down at them over the roar of his engines.

“Clear this area. Go back to your homes. Repeat,” he said, “clear this area now!”

Confused and frightened, the children left their hiding places. They clustered around Val and started down the hillside as the shadow of the helicopter swept over them, going off to warn the other hillside residents.

Farther down the hill, Cindy had heard the roar, seen the helicopter, but had not heard the warning, so obsessed was she with what was behind those bushes. “Come on out,” she cried, poking even more violently. “You really are a bitch, Val!”

Suddenly her childish features contorted in terror! She tripped and tumbled to the ground among the dead leaves! She screamed again, looking at the thing that was coming at her. The rustling grew louder as it cleared the bushes, about to strike. It was a... rattlesnake!

She screamed again! And then heard an explosion of gunshots.

The children above scampered, crawled, and ran down the hill to see policemen, their guns smoking, standing over the dead rattlesnake.

Cindy lay sobbing on the ground. The officers helped her up. "Run on home and stay there," an officer told her.

The other children were all around Cindy now, looking down with disgust at the dead rattlesnake. Val grabbed her sister and started off down the hill.

"I'll never be mean to you again," she sobbed.

"Oh, Val," Cindy said, more controlled now than Val, "I really liked your present, really I did."

The two went off, helping each other down the hill as the rest of their friends stumbled after them.

As they reached the bottom of the hill, Alex, still holding the dog for protection, saw something up by the house.

"Look!" he screamed.

The children followed his gaze.

The cake, the decorations, all the paper goods were ripped apart.

The children moved closer, looking especially at the cake.

"Look," said Val in horror. "There's claw marks all over the cake. Mommy!" she cried. "Mommy!"

The mother appeared at the patio door, carrying a martini glass.

“Dear,” she admonished, “I’ve told you never to scream like that.”

“Look, Mommy,” Val cried again, “look!”

Her mother finally looked. “Oh, my God!” she moaned, dropping her glass. She whirled back into the house. “Dave!” she cried. “Dave!”

ELEVEN

An unmarked police car moved quickly along the narrow roads up by the reservoir, its very speed signifying it had come this way before; sure of the way.

Mile after mile of brush-filled terrain sped by, and then suddenly, amid all this dryness, the man-made lake appeared, glistening in the late-afternoon sun, its banks completely symmetrical.

The road followed it for a stretch, rutted, wash-boardy, then it veered off into a deep wood, getting even bumpier until it ended abruptly in front of a smallish, two-story house.

The house surprised people used to southern California. Buried there deep in the woods, it looked like a farm house one would find off the main roads in Missouri.

The car door opened and Lieutenant Perkins got out. He spoke to some other people still in the car. "Supervisor of the reservoir usually lives here. We moved him to a motel," he said.

Jody appeared. "Here, let me help you," said Perkins, helping her out of the back seat. Eugene was getting out the other side, stiff from his bandages.

As Jody, Eugene, and Perkins crossed the front lawn, the driver, a uniformed policeman, reached into the back seat and took out several hangers bearing clothes.

Another car appeared up the tree-shaded driveway. It stopped, letting out its one passenger, Mallory.

He walked toward the three, inspecting the house as he approached.

“Cozy,” he said, smiling, meaning to be funny.

Jody stiffened. Even after Eugene had told her who he was and why he acted the way he did, she still couldn't stand the man. What was she doing here with these men, with these clothes they had bought for her and Eugene with funds from the city budget?

Gene had explained the whole thing in the hospital. They were to be brought to this house near where Frank Davis was killed. How do they know that? Jody thought. Gene saw the body — oh, he wouldn't miss it, as if he were the county coroner, or something — but how do they know the baby, my baby, killed him? Why would he kill Frank Davis? He was the only one trying to save his life, for God's sake!

Now we're supposed to be the — what did he call it? The bait. Yes, that's it, the bait. We're supposed to sit here in the middle of these woods and wait for the baby, looking for his mother, to show up, so they can blast him, kill him, with their guns.

“Will you get the groceries out of the trunk?” Perkins asked, turning to the policeman.

“Sure thing,” said the policeman, handing Jody her new clothes.

“Thank you,” said Jody, just as her mother taught her. Groceries! Boy, they think of everything. I bet they had the city nutritionist figure out what the average mother and father would eat, waiting as “bait” two or three days for someone to kill their child.

“How do you like it, Mrs. Scott?” asked Mallory, trying to be friendly.

"It's funny," said Jody. "I saw a house like this in a dream once. No, more than once. It kept coming back. Maybe it was a nightmare."

Perkins looked at her strangely, anxious to change the subject, get them in the house, get this whole thing worked out, finish this damn thing and be done with it.

"The bedrooms are upstairs. Two of them," he said, leading them toward the house.

"That'll be perfect," said Eugene. Jody was not the only one who had been thinking. Eugene still remembered how Jody had turned away from him in that room. And then at the hospital, not a word about his wounds, nothing. Only, "Where's the baby?" The baby! That thing is no baby... Well, she can sleep alone from now on. At least until she makes the first move.

"Well, let's go. Might as well get it over with," said Eugene, offering a hand to Jody. That was the best he could do — help her up the stairs.

Jody coldly turned the other way.

Eugene shrugged and bounded up the stairs and through the door Perkins held open for them.

Inside, Perkins showed them around the tiny house. The uniformed policeman was stacking the shelves and the refrigerator with the city-bought groceries.

Finished downstairs, Perkins led the Scotts up the narrow stairway to the second floor.

"This is the hall," said Perkins.

"No kidding," remarked Jody under her breath.

Eugene turned, annoyed. Perkins apparently had not heard as he brightly led them into the first bedroom.

Jody didn't care who had heard as she followed Perkins into the bedroom.

Very quaint. The interior decorator could have been Norman Rockwell. It was all there, the canopy bed, the furnishings complete in Colonial decor.

I can just imagine the supervisor of the reservoir's sex life, said Jody wickedly to herself.

"The only thing they warned us about were some holes in the roof. But the forecast doesn't predict rain," said Perkins. "If there's one thing this city could use, it's rain."

The required small talk, thought Jody, trying to put us all at ease. And now the other one, the other killer, is going to talk. Mallory looked as if he were getting ready to speak.

"We patched in special direct lines yesterday," he said. "If you need us, you can dial seven. We made several dry runs. We can be here in under five minutes."

"It's still somewhere in these hills," Perkins added. "They found a coyote this morning with its throat cut out. Nothing else could have done it."

"You're sure, Lieutenant?" asked Jody.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Perkins, looking over at her.

"You're sure it was..." She searched to find the correct word, then blurted out, ". . . my baby?"

"Yes, Mrs. Scott," Perkins answered. "Yes, we are."

"Did you do an autopsy on the coyote?" she asked sarcastically.

"Yes, ma'am, that's exactly what we did," said Perkins. "We found traces of blood on the coyote that matched up with traces of blood found on Davis's body."

“Which also matched up,” interjected Mallory, “with the blood found in the motor home in Tucson.”

There was a lengthy silence. Then Jody spoke. “So that's that.”

“I'm afraid so,” said Perkins.

Again the silence. The four stood there awkwardly, Eugene anxiously trying to think of something to say.

“And you think it'll come to us?” he said, knowing the answer already, having discussed all this at the hospital earlier.

Mallory didn't mind, he would play the game. After all, he had talked about little else for the past two years, anyway. “If you're here alone it will. It sure will.”

“We can't be too close,” said Perkins. “It'll sense our presence. It's all going to be up to you.”

“For four minutes, that is,” said Jody.

“For four minutes,” Perkins repeated. “Four minutes is a long time when you're dealing with something like this.”

He opened a small bag he had been carrying and withdrew two deadly-looking .38 caliber pistols and two boxes of ammunition. He placed them almost tenderly on the gleaming, well-cared-for surface of an oak bureau as if he were afraid he might damage the antique wood.

He then turned, and carefully avoiding any mention of what he had done, crossed the room. “Let us know,” he said, “when you run out of groceries.”

Jody moved quickly across the room, picking up one of the guns. She would not let Perkins off as easily as that. “I don't know if I can use this thing, Lieutenant,” she called after him.

Perkins turned, his eyes soft, about to say something, but Mallory stepped in, his voice hard and threatening. "You saw what it did to your husband, didn't you?"

"That wasn't ours," Jody flared back at Mallory. "You know that wasn't ours."

Mallory fired right back at her, "Want to see some photographs of Frank Davis's body?"

"No, I don't, Mr. Mallory," stormed Jody, "though I'm sure you have them right there in your wallet."

"All right, come on now," said Perkins.

Finally Eugene intruded, backing his wife. "Listen, we're volunteers, remember. You were all set to send us back to Tucson. We'll do our job here, won't we, Jody?"

Jody turned away, facing the corner.

"Just get the hell out of here," said Jody. "We'll do what's expected of us."

Mallory spun around and left. Perkins followed but stopped at the door.

"I wish there were some other way," he said.

Jody remained facing the wall. Eugene nodded.

"Remember, four minutes," she heard Perkins say, then his heavy footsteps receded down the stairs.

Eugene looked at Jody. Her slim back still faced him.

"Jody?" he said.

"Leave me alone," she said, not turning around. "Please."

Silence... and then Eugene's footsteps leaving the room.

"I'll take the other bedroom," he muttered as he left.

The door closed. Jody heard another sound outside. She moved a step or two toward the window. Mallory and Perkins were getting into their cars, pulling out and down the dirt road; then disappeared into the trees.

Is this me, is all this happening to me? Jody thought. What am I doing here? She heard a noise in another part of the house. It was Eugene downstairs.

Jody went out the door and down the narrow stairway into the living room and then into the kitchen. Eugene was rearranging the groceries, "Want something to eat?" he asked. "Got eggs, bacon, all sorts of things."

"No, thanks," said Jody.

Eugene shrugged and went on with his sorting. Jody sat at the table, listlessly staring at a black telephone. When was the last time I saw a black telephone? she thought.

"How long have they been gone?" asked Jody.

"Who?" said Eugene, absorbed in his groceries.

"Perkins and that other one," she said.

"About five minutes."

Jody picked up the phone and quickly dialed seven. That was all, just the number seven.

Instantly a voice came on — Perkins! "Yes?" he said.

"I just wanted to see if you were there," Jody said quickly, immediately hanging up the phone.

Eugene looked over. "You all right?" he asked.

" 'Course I'm all right," she said, her face hard, closed. "Never felt better."



It was night. Jody was in bed, eyes wide, staring fixedly at the wall. The room was lit by a small lamp with a lampshade that exactly matched the wallpaper. The wallpaper! Jody could not get over the wallpaper.

A dashing gentleman in a top hat, jacket, tight-fitting trousers, and gleaming leather boots had just dismounted from his horse. He stood talking to a young woman in a gown of yards and yards of the finest material.

My God, Jody thought, what it must have cost to dress in those days — the dry cleaning alone. They didn't have dry cleaning in those days, she grinned to herself.

Suddenly she was cold. She put her hands under the covers, feeling her stomach, still soft from the baby. She heard a noise, as if someone were turning in bed, having a hard time getting to sleep.

“Gene,” she said. “Oh, Gene, I'm sorry... I'm sorry, I can't help it. Please forgive me. Please...” She said it softly, intentionally so... so that Gene couldn't hear her.



The next morning as Jody came downstairs, Eugene was lying on the couch watching her.

“You were here all night?” she asked.

“Most of it, couldn't sleep,” he answered.

Jody went to the window and looked out. "They didn't even leave us a car to get out in."

Eugene got up. He came to the window. "They're watching us from that fire station way up on the ridge," he said, pointing up the hill behind the house, making sure he stayed far enough away from his wife so that they didn't accidentally touch. "They know every move we make."

Jody looked up suddenly. She caught him looking tenderly down at her long dark hair. Eugene turned quickly away. He searched for something to say, something impersonal to break the mood of that look he had been caught with.

"Oh," he said, crossing the room, "somebody was kind enough" — he picked up a cardboard box that came with the groceries — "to forward our mail."

He began sorting through the cardboard box, bringing out this letter and that. "I was rummaging through here this morning and found this. No matter what happens, the wheels of society must turn, you know."

He selected one letter and held it up for Jody. "Here it is. We better do something about this or they'll turn off our electricity."

Jody came to join him as Eugene searched for another one and, finding it, pulled it triumphantly out of the box. "Oh, yes, here it is. Guess who this is from?" he shouted, holding up the envelope.

"Who?" said Jody.

He laughed, a strangled kind of laugh. "You won't believe it," he said.

"Who is it?" she asked again.

He ripped it open. "Dr. Fairchild," he laughed. "He's billing us for the delivery."

He was laughing harder now, a forced, almost insane laugh. Jody stood watching him, terrified. She felt she was about to break, but not Eugene. She had thought no matter what happened, Eugene would always be there, steady, strong, to lean on. Now she watched him sitting there, cracking like fragile glass in front of her.

“You know, if you don't pay him,” he laughed insanely, “he'll probably sue you and will win, too! He'll ruin your credit. They'll take away your Master Charge.”

Jody couldn't take it any more. “Oh, Gene,” she said, going to him, holding him. “Gene, I'm sorry, so sorry.”

But it was empty. It had to be empty, she thought. What was she sorry about? What had she done that she wouldn't do again?

TWELVE

It was night again, two days later. In the same fire station, Perkins, Mallory, and police officials were watching the reservoir supervisor's house through long-range telescopes.

Perkins was tired; he hadn't slept. "Three days," he said. "Seems more like months."

"It's got to come," said Mallory. He was alert, expectant, and fresh. He fed on this, as if he smelled the proximity of the creature and it energized him. "It's got to try to kill them both. That's it's nature."

"You're sure?" said another policeman behind Perkins.

"I'm positive," said Mallory, quickly, surreptitiously, bringing his hand to his mouth and taking a bite of what was left of the nail on his right index finger.

Perkins glanced over. Mallory immediately brought the hand down, hiding it in his jacket pocket. Perkins looked away, into the telescope again. Then, just as quickly, unseen by Mallory, he looked back. There goes that hand again, up to Mallory's mouth, he thought. The nails had been bitten away, down to the quick. On some of the fingers so much nail had been gnawed away that thin strips of blood were beginning to show beneath the nail surface.

Perkins looked over at the other hand, grasped firmly around the telephone linked to the house below.

The nails on that hand were in the same condition; worse even.



Below them the tiny Colonial house stood waiting for its expected visitor. High up on the roof was a jagged opening where some shingles were gone and where, most likely, over the years squirrels and other small animals had worked their way in, seeking the warmth and protection of the attic to store their food. The hole had grown bigger, as if invaded by larger animals.

The reservoir caretaker? What did he care? He'd been around animals all his life. He didn't care if a few of them wanted to roost every now and then in his attic.

Now, just about anything could work its way in there... just about anything.

Eugene Scott, stripped to the waist, leaned forward on a stool. Jody was changing the dressings on his back; a painful process, applying the ointment and the new bandages to the still-tender area.

Things between them, inwardly, were still the same. They still used separate bedrooms; they never got closer to each other than was absolutely necessary. Outwardly they talked to each other, prepared each other's food. Jody even cared for his wounds, as she was doing right now.

"Ouch!"

"Sorry," Jody apologized.

"Biting on a bullet might help," he said.

That's the worst part of it, him saying those clever little things, thought Jody, when the last thing she wanted to do was to laugh, to smile even.

As an afterthought, Eugene asked, "Where's your gun?"

"I left it upstairs by the bed," she said, applying the last of the ointment and pressing the bandage down into place.

"I told you to keep it with you all the time. Please, Jody," he said, "get it!"

"Oh, for God's sake."

Exasperated, Jody set aside the bandages and hurried up the stairs to the second floor.

"Treats me like a child," she mumbled.

Then she paused. She looked up at the ceiling. She had heard something that made her heart stop, a soft scratching, scraping sound in the crawl hole!

She turned; Eugene was still downstairs, his back turned. She tried waving to him, trying to catch his eye. Eugene turned. He saw her standing there with an odd expression on her face.

"What's the matter?" he whispered.

Before she could think of what to say, she pointed to the ceiling.

Quickly Eugene moved across the room to the foot of the stairs. He heard it, too, a soft scraping, crawling sound between the first and second floors. He moved closer to his wife.

"In the crawl hole," he whispered. He took the gun out of his belt.

"Oh, no," she gasped, the words inadvertently escaping her dry lips.

Eugene, intent on what he was doing, did not hear her. "The phone," he whispered, "use the phone," as he moved

softly and silently up the narrow stairway.

Then it was gone. It seemed to have moved away. Perhaps up through the hollow structure of the house to the next floor, as if seeking a way to get into the house. This thing that had come through the roof was now trying to get into the house proper, to get to Eugene and Jody.

Below, Jody had moved halfway across the living room, halfway to the phone, and stopped. Eugene looked back. He saw her standing in the middle of the living room.

“Go ahead,” he motioned, “go ahead, call them.”

Then he climbed higher, disappearing up the stairwell as Jody moved docilely toward the phone.

Eugene reached the top step. Cautiously, quietly, he made his way across the creaky old floors, his eyes constantly scanning the ceiling for any new noise, any opening that might be an entrance into that crawl hole.

Then, carefully, he opened one bedroom door, the one his wife had been sleeping in, and peering around in the semidarkness, stepped in. He heard something! Over there, by the closet!

Gun ready, he moved slowly, deliberately, in that direction. At the closet now, and with a deep breath, he opened the door. Nothing. Empty. The reservoir supervisor's wife had obviously taken all her clothes with her.

Another sound!

Eugene looked up. He saw it, a trapdoor leading into the ceiling. Next to it a bare light bulb hung on a short cord.

As he pulled on the cord, he heard that sound again.

“There it is,” said Eugene aloud. “There it is.”

Quickly he moved out of the closet, looking for something to stand on. He saw a small upholstered chair in front of the dressing table. In seconds he had it with him in the closet, using it to stand on as he reached up to the trapdoor over his head.



Jody, at the telephone, had lifted the receiver. Her finger reached for the "seven" in the dial... she hesitated. She couldn't do it. Slowly she set down the phone; she was not going to call.



Eugene was on the chair, reaching up, trying to dislodge the trapdoor. He was determined. Something was up there and he was going to find out what it was. He used one hand to push the door up, the other to hold the gun steady.

Suddenly it opened! Eugene turned his head as a mound of dust and dirt settled on him, some of it getting in his eyes. Never mind, the trapdoor was open! He must climb up into it now, head first.

He repositioned himself, and using the wall stud for a brace, stepped up onto the back of the chair. That gave him added height, and then he pushed himself up slowly but surely, raising himself up into that crawl hole. He had to get his hand up, then an elbow, pulling himself up with

great effort; his back still hurting badly from the slashes he'd received so recently.



Jody was coming up the staircase, intent on reaching Eugene before he did something to her baby. In her haste she tripped on a step. She righted herself and, determined, moved on, mumbling, virtually incoherent. "It's ours," she said. "We have to find out... we have to find out first. It may have come to love us... Eugene," she screamed as she stumbled again. "Eugene!"



Eugene, holding the light cord, was climbing up into the crawl hole! Suddenly there was a flurry, a flash of something at him. A screech, and a large bird flew out of the crawl hole into the closet! A bird had been trapped in the attic of the house, a bird that had flown in through that hole in the roof and was seeking a way out!

Eugene stumbled and the chair turned over. He fell to the floor of the closet, filthy from the dirt from above. He was shaken but still conscious. The bird was flying frantically around the small closet, crashing into the walls and into Eugene, his hands up to protect himself from the maddened bird.

Jody rushed into the room. She heard the commotion in the closet. She ran to it, crying, "Don't hurt it, don't hurt it!"

She pulled open the closet door, fully expecting to see her infant; instead she saw this crazed bird flying at her. It brushed her, narrowly missed hitting her directly in the face.

“Aggggggh!!” she screamed, terrified.

The bird flew out of the closet door into the room. From the floor Eugene was screaming up at Jody, “Open a window, open a window.”

Recovering, Jody rushed to the window, unlocked it, started to open it. But the window had been painted shut and wouldn't budge! The bird was insane with fright now, flying back and forth in the smallish room, banging itself into walls, screeching, clawing, trying to find a way out.

“Help me!” Jody screamed, still trying to open the window. “It'll kill itself!”

Eugene, on his feet now, moved toward the window to help Jody. Despite the chaos, he was still able to think rationally and to tell Jody what must be done.

“Call them back,” he shouted. “Quick, before they get here. Tell them it's a false alarm.”

“Never mind that,” said Jody, still trying to get the window open. “Help me!”

Eugene was at the window now, tugging, trying to get it to open. Suddenly he realized what she had done.

“You didn't call them, did you?”

“Why should I?” Jody screamed, both of them still yanking at the stuck window, the bird flying madly about them. “Don't you see, the mistakes have all been ours. We have to give it a chance. It may be coming to us for help, for love.”

“Sure,” retorted Eugene. “Everybody who believed that, Davis included, was murdered by them!”

"We don't know what happened with Frank. I don't care what the others did. This baby is ours," she cried.

The tension between them was accentuated by the smashing against the walls, the flurry, the noise.

Eugene, desperate, sure that if he didn't get that bird out of there right now he would go mad, pushed Jody away.

"Get out of the way," he roared. He grabbed both handles of the window, twisted it, pounded it, until finally he managed to pull the window open wide enough to let the bird out. But instead, he let something in! Something leaped through the window at him the very instant it was opened!

It happened so fast that Eugene and Jody saw only a flash of it at first. They knew what it was, more by the sound, the growl, than by anything else. As the bird flew out to freedom, Eugene and Jody stood there staring at this creature, their offspring, their only child!

Jody spoke first. She moved toward it, clearing her throat, trying to show the infant she was not afraid.

"Forgive me," she said.

"Jody, don't," warned Eugene.

Jody ignored him. She moved closer. "Forgive me," she said again.

"Jody, I'm telling you, stay back," cried Eugene.

Jody saw a flash out of the side of her eye. She turned. Eugene had pulled out his gun and was standing there aiming it at their child!

"Gene, throw it away. Throw away your gun," she begged. "Let him see you throw it away. He'll understand. Please! Try it!" she pleaded.

“Are you crazy?” he shouted. “Are you crazy? This has nothing to do with us! This thing, it'll kill you, don't you understand? It'll kill both of us!”

“Please, Gene, please,” she screamed.

Eugene wavered a moment, looking at the infant. For the first time he really looked at this monstrosity that was his. He saw the eyes, suddenly seeing there not only their malevolence but their understanding as it followed and seemed to comprehend the battle raging between its mother and father — hoping, it seemed to Eugene, that its mother would prevail, that its father would throw away the gun, that the father and mother would welcome their child to them.

Then he did it! Eugene threw the gun, clattering, into the corner.

Jody smiled. “Thank you,” she said.

The infant growled.

“No, no,” Jody said, turning to it. “You see, he threw the gun away. Your father doesn't want to hurt you. He loves you. You understand that, don't you? You see, he does.”

Jody moved closer. “Careful,” Eugene warned.

“We were all afraid,” Jody said, inching nearer. “That's what it was. But now we know you wouldn't hurt us. Now we want to touch you, to hold you. Let me touch you.” She drew closer, pleading, “Please let me touch you.”

Eugene watched, paralyzed with fear. What if the infant struck? The gun in the corner — could he retrieve it, fire it in time to save his wife?

Jody was on one knee now, reaching out. Those frail, delicate hands; that pale white throat, so vulnerable to

attack. And then, in a moment, she had the infant in her arms. The mother's arms enclosed it... and it began to cry!

"There, there," said Jody to her baby, "it's all right, everything is all right... You see," she said, looking up at Eugene, "it didn't want to hurt us. It wants us... it wants us to hold it. Come and hold it, Gene, please. It's just as Frank Davis said. He didn't die for nothing, Gene. He was right."

Eugene watched the scene unfolding before him, his wife holding, loving, this strange, alien thing. What should he do?

Jody continued to talk softly, pleadingly, knowing instinctively that the survival of her baby was directly linked to her husband's support. "Touch it, Gene, hold it, feel it in your arms, and you'll know." Eugene began to move slowly but surely toward the mother and infant.

When he reached her, Jody handed him the baby.

Taking it, he shuddered for a moment; a visible tremor as a shock wave passed through him. And then the mother and father and baby were united; holding one another, all three of them sank to the floor. A sound from the baby, not a growl really, more like a moan.

"No, no, it's all right now. Everything's going to be all right now," Jody cooed, holding her baby, holding her husband, her life together again...



Above them, the length of that tree-covered hill away, Mallory had seen the open window. Nothing going in or coming out of it, just the window open to the night air.

"I tell you," he said, insisting to Perkins, the other policemen, and several scientific advisors at the vantage point, "it's some kind of signal. That's what it is. Why else would the window be wide open this time of night?"

"They're probably hot," said Perkins. "If anything was wrong they would have phoned."

Mallory ignored Perkins and addressed his remarks more to the scientists, the men of reason, trying to convince them. "If you were afraid of something getting into the house, would you leave the window wide open? Would you?"

Silence from the scientists. Finally, a dark-complexioned man offered, "Not likely, unless you wanted the thing in the house, or just as likely, if it was already there."

"Exactly," said Mallory. "That's exactly what I think. I'm going to make the call."

"You're going to blow it," said Perkins.

"You think so?" said Mallory, reaching for the telephone. "Well, I don't. I don't think so at all."

THIRTEEN

In the San Fernando Valley, in the industrial section of Van Nuys, in a small warehouse-type building a scant five miles away from the small Colonial cottage, a crew sat waiting.

The phone rang, the phone that had been installed just days before exclusively for this call. A man garbed in protective clothing reached over, instantly picking it up on the first ring.

"Fredricks," he said.

"Roll it," said a voice, Mallory's voice. "You hear me, roll it!"

That was all. The phone clicked dead.

"Let's go," said the man, getting quickly to his feet.

With Fredricks in the lead, seven members of his crew, all dressed in the same type of protective clothing, charged out the door and into the night.

Outside the building, a huge sign in the parking lot carried the name of Mr. Fredricks's place of business: FREDRICK'S EXTERMINATING SERVICE.

Under that was depicted a series of different kinds of bugs, each with human-like faces and all in different states of discomfort as the lettering proclaimed loudly: WE KILL ANYTHING THAT WALKS, CRAWLS, OR JUST LIES THERE.

Below the sign, policemen sitting in two squad cars turned to watch Fredricks and his crew run from the building.

"It's on," Fredricks yelled.

Requiring no further explanation, the squad cars sirened their way into the dark city streets, serving as escorts for the three trucks that followed, heading quickly and efficiently for their rendezvous somewhere in those dark hills up ahead.



After lying crouched together on the floor for an endless length of time, Eugene and Jody Scott had brought their baby downstairs.

Eugene had set a fire, and the amber glow cast soft shadows on his and Jody's faces as they sat cross-legged in front of the fire. Eugene held the baby, slowly explaining to it, comforting it, telling it what he would do for it.

"I'm a lawyer," he said. "You don't know what that is, do you?"

He paused as if expecting the baby to reply. Jody watched her husband, loving him for what he was saying, what he was going to do.

"I can go to court, before a judge. I can fight this. Even animals have something called the humane society to protect them. I'll find something. I'll use the law to stop them."

The baby began to moan softly. Jody took it carefully from her husband. "He wants to sleep." She smiled. "He hasn't slept in such a long, long time."

Eugene watched his wife cradling the baby, rocking it ever so softly in her arms. She is so happy, he thought. No

matter what the price, I have to keep her this happy.

Then he heard it!

“What's that?” he said.

“The fire.” Jody nodded in that direction.

Then he heard it again, a strange crackling sound like a fire, but not really. More like the crackle of plastic or cellophane.

Eugene stood up. He looked around the small living room. Nothing!

No place else to look, so he moved toward the window.

He heard it again. Louder now!

He pulled back the drape, expecting to see into the dark front yard.

Instead he saw nothing! The view from the window had been obliterated, blacked out! Something dark, frightening, had been put over the window, over the house. He heard them now, a flutter of activity, men working.

Eugene turned to face Jody, who was now aware that something was wrong. “Oh, my God.” He hissed the phrase, little more than air escaping from his tightened throat.

Jody was on her feet, the baby still in her arms. She stared at her husband.

“What?” she demanded. “What?”



Outside, working quickly and quietly, Fredricks's crew, with the aid of the police, had almost completely enclosed

the house from top to bottom under a tent of heavy-duty, completely opaque plastic material, making the small house virtually airtight.

Even now two men waited on the roof, next to the chimney, as a truck backed into place. The warning on the side of the truck clearly read: "DANGER — CHEMICALS — METHANE GAS."



Inside, Eugene answered Jody. The rumble of the truck coming closer partly obscured his answer. "They're here."

Still holding the infant, Jody crossed the room to see for herself. As she did, a figure appeared from the small kitchen to her left.

It was Mallory! Gun at the ready, he motioned to Jody and the baby. "Put it down," he said.

Instantly Eugene started to move, to get in between Mallory and his wife and the baby. "Hold it," Mallory warned.

"It isn't hurting anyone," Eugene said. "Can't you leave it alone?"

Mallory ignored him; that question, as far as he was concerned, was not worthy of an answer.

"You can still get through the kitchen window, same as I," he said. "They haven't sealed it off yet."

"Sealed it? What do you mean?" Jody screamed, not understanding what was happening.

"Listen," said Mallory, addressing both Jody and Eugene. "There's a truck full of poison gas out there. Right

now they're backing it up to the house. You're smart enough, you figure it out."



The truck was now in place and the house, except for the kitchen window, completely airtight.

On the roof, the hose from the truck was being inserted into the chimney of the house.

"It's ready," cried Fredricks, on the roof.

"Start pumping," yelled a police official on the ground.

"No, wait!" said Perkins, standing by. "They're still in there!"

"For all we know, they're dead by now!" yelled the same official.

"I said wait!" said Perkins, overruling him.



And in the house the infant was awake now. He sensed what was happening. He felt the panic welling up in him. He heard Mallory say to his mother:

"Put it down and get out. I'll take the responsibility."

"Responsibility for what? For killing him?" his mother said, defending her child.

Eugene Scott was afraid. He saw the infant squirming, moving around in Jody's arms. He knew what it could do if

aroused. He wanted to get it away from Jody.

Quickly he took it from Jody's arms, leaving Jody free to confront Mallory.

"You're making it kill! You're doing this!" Jody screamed.

"Get out of the way," yelled Mallory, trying to get past Jody to the baby. "In thirty seconds they're going to start pumping methane gas in here."

Jody, not letting him pass, went at Mallory. Clawing, almost like her baby, her arms flailing wildly, she screamed, "Leave him alone! Leave him alone!"

The baby, wilder now, thrashed crazily around in its father's arms until it finally squirmed free and landed, coiled and ready to spring, on the living-room floor.

Mallory, with a violent push, shoved Jody away. Just as he was about to shoot the creature, Eugene jumped at him. He grabbed Mallory's arm and held it up in the air.

"Let go! Let go, you crazy bastard!" Mallory screamed.

On the floor, the baby watched as his father and this evil man wrestled for control of the gun.

His father shoved the man against the wall, the gun falling free to the floor. Instantly the two of them were after it, rolling over one another, trying to get control of that thing, that gun.

The baby crawled closer to the two men, still watching intently their life-or-death struggle.

"He's helping you. He won't let anyone hurt you. He's your father," he heard his mother screaming down at him.

Why is she crying? I know he's my father. I won't let this evil man hurt him, the child reasoned as he saw Mallory pick up the gun. He saw his father break loose and smash his fist into Mallory's jaw. Then his father twisted

the gun from Mallory's hand and tossed it aside. Mallory lay there stunned.

Good! Good! thought the infant. Now I can get him!

Mallory saw the thing coming. Though dazed from Eugene's punch, the instinct of preservation took over and he began to slide across the carpet, backing away from this monster. But he couldn't get up! He just kept pulling himself back until he was cornered, the monster closing in, and no place to go!

"No! He can't hurt you now!" his mother pleaded to her baby.

Oh, but she's wrong, the infant said to himself. My mother is wrong. This man will always be out to kill me and my brothers. He must be destroyed.

His father leaned over him, calling down to him as he crawled closer.

"Keep away from him, please! He can't hurt you. I've taken his gun."

He's wrong, too. My father is wrong, too. He was close enough now. He leaped on Mallory.

Mallory screamed!



Outside, an officer heard the scream.

"That was Mallory," he yelled over to Perkins. "Damn it, what are you waiting for?"

Perkins looked up toward the two men on the roof. "Start pumping," he shouted.



Inside the house, Jody and Eugene stood immobilized with fear as they watched Mallory, the infant on him, as he staggered to his feet. He stumbled to the next room. Crazy, he tried to struggle up the stairs as the infant clung to him, going for his throat.



Mallory could not detach it, could not escape.

“Help me,” he screamed.

The methane gas began pouring down the chimney into the fireplace, smothering the fire. The poison gas, in the form of a smoky haze, was quickly filling the room!

Jody couldn't stand it. She couldn't stand by and see her baby kill this man, no matter who he was.

“Stop him,” she cried to Eugene.

Eugene moved quickly to the side of the room and retrieved the fallen gun.

Mallory had fallen down, the infant still on him. “Help me, please help me,” he gasped up at them through the haze of choking, poisonous gas.

Eugene, holding the gun, moved closer, watching Mallory's contorted face. The infant was struggling to get past Mallory's restraining arms to his throat. With a swipe

Mallory's wrist was slashed open, blood gushing over his face. Again and again the thing slashed out.

Mallory, insane with fear, screamed up at the Scotts, "If you're human, you can't let it kill me!"

Jody stood there watching this life-or-death struggle, faced with an impossible choice: to save her child or to save the life of this man, a human being who was about to be ripped apart.

Jody was coughing as the gas got to her, making it more difficult for her to see, to think!

"Please, please, don't let it kill me!" Mallory screamed. Blood was splashing everywhere.

Jody couldn't stand it any more. She saw Eugene holding the gun in his trembling hands, aiming at the back of the infant's head.

"Do it!" she screamed. "Kill it!"

"Jody?" Eugene yelled, looking quickly at her to make sure, giving her one last chance.

"Yes!" she screamed again. "Yes!"

Mallory couldn't fight any more. His arms fell back. His throat was exposed. The infant rose up for the kill.

His shaking hand still pointed at the infant's head, Eugene was coughing, too, his eyes smarting, almost blinded in the gas-filled room.

The infant was ready to strike.

"Do it!" he heard his mother say. Oh! They're going to kill me, he thought. They're killing me for killing something evil. My brothers told me they don't understand us yet in this world. They don't understand that evil must be wiped out. We'll just have to wait until they understand.

Never mind, I'll kill this evil thing under me before they kill me. At least I'll do that much... that much for my brothers and sisters...

The monster leaped for Mallory's throat.

The shot rang out.

The infant and Mallory died instantly, together, locked in each other's grasp.

Jody and Eugene, overwhelmed by the smoke, keeled over in a faint, falling together on the refinished, wide-boarded floor of the small Colonial cottage.

Then came the sounds of windows breaking, doors being crashed through, echoes of voices coming from all sides.

"Get them out of here! Bring the oxygen, quick!"

Big burly men burst into the room, one of them Perkins.

"Where is he?" he yelled.

"Who?" said another.

"Mallory."

"Over here, over here. He's dead."

"That figures," said Perkins, "thank God!"



All they would remember was the grateful smell of fresh air as they were carried out, fireman-style, into the front yard of the cottage...

FOURTEEN

It was day again. A beautiful new day. A testimony to man's ingenuity, the San Francisco skyline. Those enormous buildings perched on those precarious hills!

A man escorted his pregnant wife out of a stylish-looking building.

The medical building, so quaint, so chic, it looked more like a place one would go to buy antiques or paintings.

Attentively the man helped his wife into the luxurious-looking car waiting smartly at the curb. Placing her, like the pampered doll she was, in the front seat, he crossed around the back of the car, heading for the driver's side.

As he did, a voice, a determined-sounding voice, called out to him.

"Excuse me," the voice said. "Mr. Baxter?"

The man turned, startled.

"Excuse me. Alan Baxter? May I have a minute of your time?"

"Huh?" said Mr. Baxter. Then he recovered, his proper upbringing taking over. "Do I know you?" he asked.

The man moved closer. It was Eugene Scott!

His face was different — leaner. The easy look, the suntanned, Tucson-country-club look of a few months ago, gone. In its place, the hard-eyed look of a convinced zealot.

"No, we've never met," he said intently, "but it's very important that we talk. It's about you and your wife... and

the new baby.”

“Yes?” said the man, and then, smiling, “You’re not selling anything, are you?”

“No,” said Eugene, “no, Mr. Baxter, I'm not.”

Just then the clanging of a cable car fighting its way up the steep San Francisco street obliterated the rest of Eugene Scott's words. But what he was saying to Alan Baxter soon became clear.

He was telling Alan Baxter the same story Frank Davis had told him.

The cycle was repeating itself; Eugene Scott was carrying on Frank Davis's mission.

As they stood there, these two men, one of them relating to the other this incredible, unbelievable tale, the sounds of the city, the clatter, the jingle of cable cars, the honking of horns, the congestion, the chemicals, the madness of modern civilization, seemed to be closing in all around them.



In the car, the woman looked at the fancy digital clock, an option, a hundred dollars extra.

Irritably she turned. He was still talking to that strange man. What on earth could they be talking about? And Alan... so grim. What could that man be telling him?

She glanced back at the clock. My God! I'm going to be late for the hairdresser.

The car door opened. Lights on automatically, glowing softly on the car's leather interior.

“Dear,” said Alan Baxter, his face pale, “This is Mr. Scott... He has something to say to us...”